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WINDOWS IN HEAVEN

SELECTED SERMONS

BY THE LATE

Rev. J. P. STRUTHERS, M.A.

(GREENOCK)

AUTHOR OF "PILGRIM CHEER," "STORIES TWICE TOLD,"
"ECHOES FROM 'THE MORNING WATCH,'" ETC.

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PREFACE

BROUGHT up among those belonging to one of the "most straitest sects" of religion—I do not say of "Pharisees," although that title was frequently applied to them by their less devout neighbours—who held it to be wrong in a minister to *read* his sermon, my husband from his earliest ministry never had recourse when preaching to the carefully prepared notes which were in his pocket; but there came a day when to the astonishment of the congregation the minister carefully arranged his sheets of manuscript on the pulpit desk and proceeded deliberately to *read* his sermon.

In a letter dated 19th August, 1906 (the 28th year of his ministry) he gives his reason. He writes:

"I have just finished writing out my afternoon sermon. It is the first sermon I have ever written out word for word, and I mean to read it. I find I am getting slipshod, and I wish to see if my people do not listen better. My subject is rather an odd one. The beams of the little chambers round the Temple of Solomon were not to be put into the wall, but were to rest on the ledges; the meaning being that we are not to make the stability of man, or anything temporary or human, a part of the fabric of God's temple. It is a fine

subject, and I have been thinking of it all the week."

Then on the evening of the day on which he preached that sermon he wrote :

" I read my sermon to-day for the first time in my life ! I never had even a note in my Bible before. My people looked a bit astonished, and certainly some of them for the first time slept none."

Later he wrote :

" For three Sabbath afternoons I have *read* my sermon. I thought it would do both me and my people good. It feels queer, and I don't think the best of them like it. A good many feel I must have some other reason, e.g. mental break-down."

The sermons written out " word for word " are gathered into this little volume. They are not many, for by common consent the sermons not read were the more acceptable.

Few though they be they are put into the hands of the Master who fed the multitude with but five barley loaves and two small fishes.

A. L. S.

Greenock
1926

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God's Care for Debtors

PART 1

Waiting for the Pledge

When thou dost lend thy brother any thing, thou shalt not go into his house to fetch thy pledge. Thou shalt stand abroad, and the man to whom thou dost lend shall bring out the pledge abroad unto thee.—Deut. xxiv. 10, 11.

That is to say, the creditor was to act like a gentleman to the utmost of his power. He was to respect the sanctity of the debtor's home.

In this world we are limited in everything, and in nothing more than in that very thing which in itself is limitless—our love. In heaven there will be neither doors nor walls between man and man. None of the old love will be lost, yet in every direction it will be widened, bounded no more either by want of time or knowledge or opportunity, or by competing and inconsistent claims. Our love will be like God's :

> "A good diffused,
> And in diffusion ever more intense."

But in this world, by God's own ordinance, we dwell in families, and have homes of our own with locks and bolts and bars. We have rights with which no stranger may intermeddle. The home life and the family life are sacred things.

The preservation of this sacredness is one of the principles that Protestantism has ever gloried in, and one of the things that in many ways Romanism has always sought to undermine.

Rich people, from kindness or curiosity, or the habit of doing what they like, are sometimes tempted to treat the poor as they would never dream of treating their own equals. When "slumming" was the craze in London some time ago, it was humorously asked how the rich would take it if the poor were to retaliate and insist on visiting the homes of the upper classes, to enquire into their circumstances, their incomes, outlays, the number and ages and characters of their sons and daughters, and their mode of spending their evenings and their Sabbath days. The late Dean Butler, of Lincoln, was so far as wise man when as a rector he told his curates to "show as much respect to the poorest cottager as to the greatest peer. The head should always be uncovered on entering any house, and a chair should not be taken until offered."

The rich in the days of Moses would be like the rich now, and a creditor would be specially tempted to forget his manners. Hence the warning of the text.

The debtor was, further, to have nothing done to him that would injure his self-respect. He was to be treated, as far as possible, as a free agent—a man acting not wholly from compulsion—and as a man of honour who could be trusted for a moment out of sight.

Most of all, I think, God wished the poor

debtor's honour to be upheld before his wife and children. If the creditor went into the house, the children could not help noticing his insolence, or his unfriendliness, or their own father's confusion. And God wishes children to be happy, knowing no wrong, and suspecting none. A father is the greatest being in the world to his boy. God has made him so, and that fact should be a mighty motive to every father to do well. He represents God to his child. If the father's honour suffers, from sin of his own, or the unkindness of another, the Father in Heaven is dishonoured, too. "Unhappy is the boy," says Euripides, "who knows anything against his father." If *he* is bad, what has the child left to fall back upon? All the foundations are destroyed.

If a father or mother has to be found fault with, it should not be done before their children. Most of us have known people who, when they wished to reprove us, seemed to wait on a chance of affronting us as well. And we felt it to be cruel.

Try to make it easy for a boy to honour his father and mother. A man once told me that it was a new world to him when, as a child, one day he heard his father thus saluted on the street by a boy who turned out to be his master's son, "Hello, Bill!" It was kindly meant, but in the presence of his child a father should be called "Mr." by everyone except his very dearest friends. For the same reason, I think that a mistress, when she writes a letter to her maid,

should address the envelope, not " Mary So-and-so," but " Miss Mary," for the sake of her maid's honour in the eyes of the world. There is a proper pride as well as a foolish. The maid is " Mary " to her mistress ; but she is not " Mary," unless with her own consent, to any postman in the land.

God never puts anyone to shame till He can't help it. Even in that hour when Judas was going out to betray his Lord, our Saviour uttered His most awful warning so gently that " no man at the table knew for what intent He spake unto him." They thought Christ was only sending him on an errand of mercy ! So if we must reprove the sinner let us still show him that we honour him. Even when we beat him with rods, let us count and weigh our strokes and not exceed, " lest our brother should seem vile unto us " (Deut. xxv. 3).

And lastly, God surely wished men to keep out of debt. A debtor is not a free man. The borrower is servant to the lender (Prov. xxii, 7). The tie between them is not one of " the cords of a man," or one of " the bands of love."

When the creditor comes for his pledge, he, alone of all men, except the thief, must be kept outside.

" Therefore," says God, as it were, " try to avoid dealing with men whom you cannot ask into your house or introduce to your wife and little ones. Owe no man anything save to love one another."

And God wished the creditor, too, to feel the

awkwardness of the position he was in, so that, if possible, he might say, "Rather than stand outside this way, as a creditor waiting for his pledges, I will go without my pledge, and come into your house as a 'brother beloved.'" Is not that the way God deals with us? The creditor comes, not as a guest or welcome visitor, but saying, "Pay me that thou owest"; he demands his pledge, takes us by the throat, casts us into prison, sells all we have and turns our dear ones into the street. But God stands at the door and knocks, saying, "Open to Me. To-day I must abide at thy house. I come with pardon, with help, in love. Where is Sarah thy wife? Suffer thy little children to come unto Me and forbid them not. Hast thou here any beside? Thou art poor; I counsel thee, therefore, to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be—not out of debt, but rich."

God's Care for Debtors

PART II

The Inviolable Millstone

No man shall take the nether or the upper millstone to pledge, (No man shall take the mill or the upper millstone to pledge. R.V.) : for he taketh a man's life to pledge.—Deut. xxiv. 6.

In those far-off days every family had its own hand-mill, and ground its own grain. To a Hebrew, therefore, a mill was as much a necessary of life as a fireplace or a kettle is to us. To take it away was either to starve him or, worse still, to turn him adrift on the community as a beggar. And the man who would offer his mill in pledge thereby proclaimed himself utterly shiftless and thoughtless—one who never looked beyond the moment—discharging one debt by incurring another, and that other not only a bigger one, but one which, in the very act of incurring it, he made it impossible to pay, for how could he meet his liabilities unless he took his food ? "

By the law of England, when a man's goods are distrained or pounded for debt, he is allowed to keep his working tools or implements to the value of £5. One sees in pawnshop windows every day great heaps of workmen's tools—the joiner's plane, the mason's mall, the carpenter's foot-rule. How any man that has

a heart can take such things as pledges it is not easy to see. Bankrupts, also, by our laws are permitted to retain their watches—a watch being looked on as a thing a man cannot do without—though surely the law is strained when a bankrupt is allowed to keep a gold watch and chain. The plainest, good-going "Waterbury," with a penny black cord, would better become him if he were an honest man. And of all women in the world, a bankrupt's wife and daughters should pay special heed to what the Apostle Peter says, and adorn themselves, not with the wearing of gold or the putting on of apparel, but with the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit; and the meeker and quieter the better.

It is quite a common thing for men, like the debtor in the text, to give up with one hand more, infinitely more, than they get with the other. That was what Satan tempted our Lord to do when he showed Him all the kingdoms of the world, and all the glory of them, and said, "If Thou wilt fall down and worship me, all shall be Thine." It was a lie to begin with, for the world is not and never was the devil's; but even if it had been his to give, his conditions made his offer valueless. "Give yourself and all you have to me, and I will give you what I will give you!" It was as if a thief said, "Give me your purse, and I will put something into it, provided you give me not only your purse, but yourself to keep."

The words also imply that we are sure of our daily bread. To have the mill and not provide

the corn would be worse than meaningless. It would indeed be giving us a stone when we asked for bread. But God does not mock us. "He that walketh righteously and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil; he shall dwell on high; his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure." God may let us come to our last handful of meal, but He will multiply it, or He will rain bread from Heaven; or send angels or ravens with supplies, or He may keep us alive simply by the Word of His power, as He did Christ in the wilderness—who in this as in all other points was tempted as no man ever was; but let us die of hunger, if we are His, He never will, unless by such a death He means us to glorify Him as we could not do by living.

The taking away of a millstone was not only an irreparable loss to the debtor, but it brought no gain to the creditor. What could he do with it? We are all tempted to keep the useless halves of things, to act the dog in the manger, which will not let the ox use the hay that it cannot eat itself. The petted only son, who marches off with his ball at rounders or cricket, because he is given "out," and knows that the others cannot have a game without him; the foolish housewife who buys things at auctions that she has no need of, and bids against another

simply because she cannot bear to see a bargain going past her; the land-owner who lives abroad and forbids his park gates to be opened; the duke who claims the coast line for a hundred miles and will not suffer a fisherman to dry his nets upon the shore, or a villager to gather pebbles on the beach; the man who has books, who never reads and will not lend; the elder, or deacon, or minister who will not move himself, and puts a spoke in another's wheel, and by objections, protests, dissents, appeals and more appeals, stops all procedure for months and years—are all instances of men who take the upper millstone to pledge. They spoil another's life, to encumber, but not to enrich, their own.

Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

In the text before us, God gives us another cord by which we may bind Him Himself. God does not deal in halves. We cannot understand the awful mystery of His eternal decrees. The Judge of all the earth must do what is right. Seraphim and cherubim, who see the dark side of things as no man ever did, cry one to another as they come into His presence from all parts of His dominions, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts." God Himself at last, as He sits upon the Great White Throne, will justify whatever He has done, in the light not only of His sovereignty, but of His justice.

One thing we do know—that He not only invites, but *commands* us to repent; and in so doing, surely He pledges Himself to give us power to obey Him if only we ask, and keep

asking, for it? Else He would do what He forbids us to do—leaving the nether millstone, but taking away the upper. We have His own words: "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." And if we will not believe in the honesty and genuineness of God's offer when He speaks by His Spirit and by His Son, shall we not believe Him when we hear the saints in glory, men and women of our own flesh and blood, bearing witness to His truthfulness? They know all that puzzles and perplexes us, but they have seen His Face, and the only word they have to say to us is, "Come."

God's Care for Debtors

PART III

Returning the Garment

If thou at all take thy neighbour's garment to pledge, thou shalt restore it unto him by that the sun goeth down; for that is his only covering, it is his garment for his skin: wherein shall he sleep? And it shall come to pass, when he crieth unto Me, that I will hear; for I am gracious.—Exodus xxii. 26. R.V.

A good night's rest, next to a whole night of prayer, is the best preparation for a hard or an anxious day's work. "If he sleep, he shall do will." It not only strengthens both body and mend, but it cheers the spirit. For when we sleep, God, so to speak, relieves us from our post for a time, and mounts guard Himself. Whether we mean it or not, during all these hours we cast our care upon Him; we let Him look after things, and He cares for us. Not only does He keep awake, neither slumbering nor sleeping, but He works on our behalf, and is allowed to work without our interference. "Sleep," says George Macdonald, "is God's contrivance for giving man the help He cannot get into him while he is awake." We rise in the morning and we are forced to say like Jacob when he awoke, "Surely God was in this

place, and I knew it not." It is not the least of the punishments of certain forms of sin, such as drunkenness, that the devil gets part possession of a man's night hours, and the time of rest becomes a time of horror.

It is a poor—a very poor—man whose case is considered in those words in Exodus. Very often he would be an ill-doing man as well; all the more need that he should have a good night's sleep, a little time of forgetfulness and of strengthening. But how can he sleep, says God, unless he be warm? In mountainous, tropical countries the frost by night is as great as the drought by day. The traveller who breaks the ice for his morning bath may have a sunstroke if he quits the shelter of his tent at noon.

Before evening comes, therefore, the creditor must send for his debtor, or as God tenderly calls him here, his neighbour, whose garment he holds in pledge. There is an interchange of courtesies, a chance of reconciliation, an act of kindliness and a show, at least, of trust. When the garment is given back, other questions will arise: "Have you had food to-day? Any food to eat to-night or to-morrow morning? And what about your wife and hungry little ones?" The compulsory meeting of creditor and debtor becomes a time of love. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

Now, as Grotius said when he read the parable, "I am that publican," so may every sinner say, I am this debtor; and what God asks me to do

to my debtor, He surely binds Himself to do to His. What robe, He asks me, have I got to cover myself with when I lie down to sleep to-night? It is a fearful thing to lie down with His wrath abiding on me. And wherein shall I sleep my last sleep in the grave? Surely not in the tatters of mine own righteousness, which is but filthy rags, not in the raiment of the world's esteem, a robe seen through by any who come close enough to me; still less in the dress of the world's ignorance or my own forgetfulness of sin — a covering which the breath of a holy God may blow away at any moment; nor shall I weave a garment of vows and resolutions to do better, which is but a spider's web; still less may I attempt to put on pride and cursing, and defy my Maker thus arrayed, naked and not ashamed. Were it even possible to have all these robes at once and wear them all together, the bed would be shorter than that I could stretch myself on it, and the covering narrower than that I could wrap myself in it. It is God Himself who strips me of all these, who asks wherein shall I sleep to-night? It is that same God who says, Thou art wretched and miserable and poor and naked; who also says, I counsel thee to buy of Me white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear. And all this He promises to do *to-day* if I ask Him—before I go up to my bed, before I give sleep to mine eyes or slumber to mine eyelids. This brings salvation very near me; it is a question not of days, but of hours. I cannot do very long

without sleep: that is God's ordinance; sleep within eight and forty hours at most I must; to sleep unsaved without the righteousness of Christ, He forbids me. Therefore I will take Him at His word; I will wrestle with Him; I will not let Him go till I get the blessing, and the new name and the best robe; and I will get them before the breaking of another day.

Balak and Balaam

Come, I pray thee, with me unto another place.—Numbers xxiii. 13.

FREQUENTLY one reads advertisements telling where and for how much you may get your fortune told. Every winter you will find at bazaars for churches and charities a tent set up in some corner, and men, but usually women, of all ages waiting their turn to pay their shilling to be told what the future has in store for them. Yet the last question put to our Risen Lord by His disciples brought from Him this answer : "It is not for you to know times or seasons, which the Father hath set within His own authority." And the question these men put about the unknown future would have seemed a very worthy one, for it concerned, not their own personal affairs, not such questions as people put to a palmist about their chances of marriage or wealth or long life, but questions as to the welfare and glory of their country and the Kingdom of their God. It is not for you to know times or seasons.

The last words our Lord uttered ere He ascended on high to receive gifts for men—words uttered as He raised in blessing the almighty hands that had been pierced for them, were :

" Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

The only word that fully sums up God's attitude to us is the one word LOVE—a love so great, yes, so infinite, so long-continued, yes, so eternal, so strong, yes, so almighty, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from it, for it has come to us in the person and for the sake and for the glory and joy of Jesus Christ our Lord, the Second Person of the Godhead; and He that spared not His Own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things ! These promises, these comforting assurances, have been kept in the experience of all believers for 1900 years. And yet our newspapers and our Christian churches are not ashamed to increase their gains and pay their debts by seeking the wages of iniquity; and our maidens and our aged women are not afraid to collogue with the devil and affront and blaspheme the Lord God of Hosts. If these sinful, shameful, devilish things can take place in covenanted Scotland in this year of grace, need we wonder at the heathen trying to get round God and defeat His purpose thirty-three hundred years ago ?

You all know the story of Balaam. Somehow or other he had acquired an uncanny reputation. " I wot," said Balak to him, " that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest

is cursed." It doesn't take much capital or apparatus of any kind to become a fortune-teller. Get rid of conscience, put on a brow of brass that cannot blush—that refuses to be ashamed, assume an air of mystery, be ready to tell lies by the gross, defy God, and charge your fee—that's all the equipment that is needed: people will come to you, people who are not afraid of God will swallow any lie you offer them, and more when they are needed. A successful prognostication—and the man must be a fool who can't foresee some things, especially when they have happened already—will fill them with wonder and admiration; a failure with fear, and with even more wonder. There must be unsuspected malign influences which demand further investigation, and another and a higher fee. And when at last she has exhausted the patience and the credulity and the money of those who consult her, and has broken a few hearts and wrecked some lives, the fortune-teller has only to give up her lodgings and seek fresh fields and pastures new. The fools in some other town who have been bled already will welcome a new practitioner, a new devil's emissary, with open arms.

Balaam was perhaps the cleverest soothsayer that ever lived. He had a touch, and more than a touch, of genius. But there are more things in heaven and earth than were dreamt of in his philosophy. God also, as the prophet says, is wise. Him whom neither the voice of God nor the sword of an angel could turn, an ass

rebuked by the simple expedient of turning aside into the field, and quietly falling down under him. And when at last God seemed to yield to him, it was only to find himself more firmly than ever in the Almighty's grasp. Balaam opened his mouth, but though his heart was full of fraud and cursing and deceit, there came forth only unwilling words of blessing. What could it mean ? Here was Balaam, thirsting for praise and commendation, thirsting even more for money—for which he was willing even to sell his soul—eager to earn the pay, and yet refusing to do the work. There seemed to be some fear, some dread, some controlling power, which Balaam called God, but one that to Balak seemed only a local passing influence. To Balak it appeared to be only the result of the nearness of the tents of Israel—the fascination of proximity. A camp like theirs was probably never seen before or since. Laid out in its whole plan by Him Who framed the universe, well-ordered in all detail, most beautifully sweet and clean, a place through which God Himself delighted to walk, it was a whole nation's lodging-place ; it was the camp of a most mighty host, it was the city of the Great King; and through the desert air at morning, and at evening, and at dawn, there was the voice of melody and praise. As a spectacle it must have been overwhelmingly impressive. And for one man to stand up and curse that host would seem as futile a proceeding as pelting Mount Sinai with stones, or as a dog's barking at the moon.

But distance might lend disenchantment, and absence might make the heart grow braver, and if Balaam were only to see one little corner of the camp, a few tents on its utmost border, he might pluck up courage and alter his malignity. The boy whose courage oozes out at his finger tips in presence of his enemy becomes brave when he has got round the corner, and is not afraid to say what terrible things he will do, when there is no one there to hear him.

I want you to see that the same thing happens with ourselves every day.

There are times when God and the things of God are very near, and startlingly, aye, overwhelmingly oppressive.

For example, it is not easy to curse Christ when you read the story of His life and death. You may set out like the chief priests' officers to apprehend Him, but you find you dare not do it when you are come into His presence. When the Duke of Gloucester, afterwards Richard III, is sending the two murderers to kill his brother Clarence, Shakespeare makes him thus address the men :

"When you have done, repair to Crosby-place.
But, sirs, be sudden in the execution,
Withal obdurate, do not hear him plead ;
For Clarence is well-spoken, and perhaps
May move your hearts to pity, if you mark him."

So with the men in the gospels. "Why have ye not brought Him ?" "Never man spake like this man." So with you and me.

Firstly, there are times when, as we look at the babe lying in the manger, or watch Christ receiving sinful men, and hear Him pleading with us, Come unto Me; or look at Him in Gethsemane, or as He turns His cheeks to the smiters, and prays for the men who are driving nails into His hands and feet, or seeks to comfort the sufferers around Him in His own hour of agony, our hearts go out to Him, and we say, Of a truth this is the Son of God ; this man hath done nothing amiss; and we are almost persuaded to say, He is my Lord and my God. But Satan urges time, reflection. We cannot curse Christ on a Communion Sabbath day. Wait a little; stand further off, and we who cannot doubt His love on that day, with the symbols of His atoning blood in our hands, can curse Him with all our hearts in the dimmer, colder light of a common day. There are some here this afternoon perhaps whose hearts are very cold, if not hostile to Christ, and there was a day once that you can hardly remember now, when your heart was touched, and there were tears in your eyes, at the thought of His love, and you were not far from the Kingdom of God. It was flood-tide that day, and you missed it, and you are now stranded high and dry and cold and dead.

Or secondly, it was an hour of trouble, of disappointment, of shame ; things went against you; your mind seemed almost as if it would give way ; you saw the great sea-billows, and you began to sink, and you cried, Lord, save me, I perish. And He put forth His hand, and the

storm was changed into a calm, and you wondered and worshipped. He was a very present help that hour, and you could say nothing against Him. But that hour passed, and is now far away; the danger is forgotten; or else you feel that it was magnified. Your feelings got the better of you for a moment, but now you are yourself again; you are away from Christ, you have no need of Him; you see but the merest fringe of your trouble and dismay, you can safely curse Him now.

Or thirdly, once you were very ill; some trouble brought you very near to the brink of death. You were in a burning fever; you could not breathe; the torturing pain unmanned you; you cried for the doctor and tried to read his thoughts; when it was morning you said, Would God it were evening! and when it was evening, Would God it were morning! What am I to do? Can no one help me? Can no one do anything for me? You seemed to draw nigh the gates of death, you saw the King of Terrors, you faced eternity, and wondered what it must be to open one's eyes in another world and find one's doom fixed for ever and ever. It was not Christ that you cursed then, but sin and Satan and your foolish self, and you made vows—but these vows you have not kept. You have got to another place, you see things from another point of view, your suffering is past, you are far from the realms of death now; you were never stronger, fairer, or more prosperous. You feel as if your mountain stood firm and never could be moved.

Or fourthly, you were very near Christ in one of His members. You had a godly father or a godly mother, a sister or a brother who died early and had spoken to you lovingly of Christ; you sang to such an one the 23rd Psalm to her favourite tune; or you knew one genuine good man, an elder, a teacher, some man in business—not one of these was perfect, but you felt they had the root of the matter in them; you said, Aye, if they were all like that, business would be pleasure and life would be worth living, and earth would be like heaven—that *was* a man, that *was* a saint. And with that parent's voice ringing in your ears, with that brother's or sister's smile—a smile that overcame the thoughts of pain—beaming on you—or with that man's example still bright in memory, you dared not say one word against the faith that was in them, or the Lord that owned them for His own. But your father is dead, your mother is dead. The good folk of your youth—why, it is five or seven years since you saw them; the edge of memory is dulled. You have seen a lot of so-called Christians since then, and they are pretty queer. You have found Parsees and Chinamen that would put the best Christians you ever saw to blush. Yes, the glamour of nearness, the fascination of proximity is gone, and from east of Suez, from the distance of half the earth's circumference, you feel free to despise and ridicule and forsake and even curse the good old ways. That childish folly of your youth—that sentimental goody-goody stage—is a long way off;

you live in the light of another day and another clime; you are east of Suez, you repeat.

But someone will say, I am not going to curse Christ or God or the people of God; I am saying nothing against them, and I don't wish to say anything against them. And perhaps that really is your present intention, and you certainly have never dreamt of, in so many words, actually cursing Christ. But think what it is you really do. He says He loved you from all eternity, and was asked by the Father and the Holy Ghost to die for you.

"He died that we might be forgiven,
He died to make us good;
That we might go at last to Heaven,
Saved by His precious blood.

There was no other good enough
To pay the price of sin;
He only could unlock the gate
Of Heaven, and let us in."

That is the greatest thing God ever did—the one thing He set His heart on from all eternity—the only thing that can bring Him any joy or glory. If words mean anything—to believe on God and Jesus Christ Whom He has sent is everlasting life; to disbelieve is everlasting death. And if we do *not* believe, perhaps we may say we do not *curse* Him; but we certainly say He is a liar, and a fool, and a monster, casting arrows, and firebrands, and death, playing with eternal realities, playing with hell-fire. And once you believe that, and *if* you believe that,

you cannot rest content simply with saying you do not believe Him, or you decline to say anything —you must go further and hate Him and denounce Him and condemn Him and curse Him to His face and behind His back day and night. There can be no middle attitude. He is either a good God, Who loved us from everlasting, or a lying monster worse than any fiend. And there *is* no other attitude that your heart or mine can take up to Him for an instant. And we all know it. There is not one here who, if he but search his heart and try his mind, will not be forced to confess that Christ is either all in all to him, the chiefest among ten thousand, the altogether lovely; or if He is not that—and that is what He claims to be—there is no more false and despicable being in the universe.

What then are we to do? Some of you have read the story of the younger Scipio, the man known in Roman history as Scipio Africanus. He lived two hundred years before our Lord, and by reason of his personal beauty, his accomplishments, his valorous deeds, he was while still a youth the idol of the Roman people. But when he was old their hearts turned so against him that when he was fifty-five he was accused and brought to trial before the Assembly of the people. After the charges had been read he paid no heed to them, but simply began to tell them the story of his life—how he had fought the battles of the Republic from his boyhood, how he had campaigned in Spain and Italy, and had been taking no little part in the Second

Punic War—which some historians have called the greatest war in history. Hour after hour went on as he told the story of his deeds, and even as he was in the midst of them the sun set and according to Roman law the assembly stood adjourned till next day. In the morning it resumed; the people took their seats and waited, and then came Scipio, not in the garb of one who was standing trial, but dressed in festal robes; and this is what he said: "Roman citizens, this day seventeen years ago at Zama in Africa I routed Hannibal and the Carthaginian hosts" —it was one of the decisive battles of the world— "this day I routed them, and I now go up to the Capitol to return thanks to the Immortal Gods, and I ask you Romans all to follow me." And they rose up, we read, with one accord and followed him.

Even so this afternoon, if there are any of us standing afar off from Christ, any of us crying, Away with Him, crucify Him—not knowing what we say, let us draw near and look at Him and hear the story of His life: how being God's equal He came down from heaven and took our nature and lived and died and rose again, and sits at God's right hand, our Prophet, Priest, and King, our Brother, our Mediator, our Forerunner, loving us, praying for us, preparing a place for us, longing to have us with Him. Let us come near Him, and still nearer and nearer till we see Him in all the majesty of His Eternal Godhead and in all the depths of His voluntary, unspeakable condescension, and put our finger

into the print of the nails and thrust our hand into His side, and so seeing Him our hearts will go out to Him from this time and for ever.

"We may not know, we cannot tell
What pains He had to bear;
But we believe it was for us
He hung and suffered there.

Oh dearly, dearly has He loved,
And we must love Him too,
And trust in His redeeming blood,
And try His works to do."

The 119th Psalm

For nearly two-and-a-half years we have been reading through the Psalms on Sabbath afternoons, a Psalm each day in regular order. To-day, by the good hand of our God upon us, we have come to the 119th, a Psalm which, in ordinary circumstances, we should never think of reading through at one sitting in public. Seeing, however, it has come in our way in the providence of God, and will not so come again, so far as one can see, for many years, if ever, I purpose now to read it from beginning to end, and to make it the subject of discourse. And further, in the hope that by God's Spirit we may read it the more willingly, the more intelligently, the more devoutly, and, I trust, the more lovingly, I propose to tell you, first of all, what I want to say about it, and then we shall spend twenty or twenty-five minutes reading it together. That is to say, I shall for once first ask you to listen to the sermon, and then we shall read the text, a very long text, one on which a Puritan divine once preached 190 sermons, and might as well have preached 1900, for it is big as well as long, its subject being nothing less than the Word of God, that Word which endureth for ever.

I. The Psalm is noteworthy, first, as being the longest chapter in the Bible, as the 117th

is the shortest. This great and disproportionate length is, I imagine, one of the reasons why children long ago were fired with the ambition to learn it off by heart, just as we find children still making for the highest point of the highest hill within their reach, and children of an older growth aiming at the least accessible peak in a mountain range. Is not this determination to do the hardest task, this quest of the most difficult, a proof of our kinship with that Almighty One with whom nothing is impossible ?

It may recall to some of the older of you a little of your own experience, and it may give some of the younger ones a glimpse of the Spartan rule, the stern discipline, of the olden times, if I tell you my own associations with this Psalm. My mother held two views that are not too common nowadays : (1) that a child should be brought to church from its earliest infancy every Sabbath day. She brought me, as I have told some of you mothers, thirteen times before I was a year old, and regularly ever after; and (2) she held that even during holidays a boy should do some lessons every day, partly to keep him from forgetting what he had already learnt, and partly to make play the sweeter, but most of all, I presume, from an unforgettable sense of the unspeakable solemnity of life.

When I was about eight years of age, she gave me for my six weeks' summer holiday task the learning of this Psalm. I had to read it every forenoon, and every afternoon, but only once on Saturdays; that is, eleven times a week before I

got leave to go out to play. I would not like to say it was an altogether right or wise thing to do. But if it was a blunder, may all mothers make none worse! To a blunder such as that God will be very merciful. I need not deny that I found the task irksome, and I fear I did not always do it quite honestly. But I learned the Psalm all the same, and I remember vividly that Sabbath evening when I said it from end to end, while my father held the Book. You will expect me, doubtless, to say I said it perfectly, but, as in so many things we do in life, *surgit amari aliquid*, there is always one drop of bitterness in every cup, so there was one thing to spoil my perfect satisfaction. I made one slip, and before I had time to correct it, as I was going to do, my father did it for me, to my annoyance. And that there might be still one other drop of bitterness, on the Monday evening after, a visitor to whom I told my exploit, a man who a few years later made shipwreck of life, looked at me for a moment, and then said, "What's the 33rd verse?" I told him I hadn't learnt it that way, and I felt it was an unfair question, yet somehow I felt that the glory of my achievement was departed. The gourd that had taken six weeks to grow had withered in ten seconds. Yet God has a purpose in the withering as well as in the growing of a gourd. Perhaps it was so here; and perhaps, too, the gourd may spring up again and shelter me in a coming day of need.

II. The second noteworthy thing about this Psalm is that it is what we call an Alphabetical

Psalm. It has 22 parts, corresponding to the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Each part consists of 8 couplets, as you may see by looking at the Revised Version, a Version for which we should thank God more than we do. The 1st line of each couplet in the 1st part begins with the letter A, the 1st in each couplet of the 2nd part with B, the 1st in each couplet of the 3rd part with G, and so on, according to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, which differs in many ways from ours. One can easily see, of course, that an arrangement like that must fetter a poet. It is not enough for him to have a thought, an idea. The word that expresses it must begin with one particular letter. The thought is indeed of no use to him unless it does. So, in the same way, rhyme fetters a poet. It is not enough for him to have a thought. The word that expresses it must end with a certain sound. But while rhyme seems to fetter a poet, to a true poet his fetters become rather the bands of love, the traces by which God leads him by a way he knows not. The need for a rhyme suggests as well as controls thought. It is God Himself who has put all these hidden possibilities in human words. Every *word* is, as it were, a mansion which the Holy Ghost has prepared and occupied for us, as our Forerunner, before we come to it. Every *word* is a field in which God has buried goodly pearls to be found by the man who seeks diligently for them. And as with the ends of words, so with their beginnings. God is Alpha as well as Omega. If I need for His glory a

letter which begins with M or N or Z, by God's grace I'll find it.

I should not wonder that the Psalmist, in seeking to praise God for His Word, saw the need of praising Him for *every* word, for every human sound, for that marvellous gift of speech by which we can frame, and utter, and make permanent, and pass on over land and sea, over space and time, our feelings, our desires, our knowledge, and even our characters. Speech is one of the good gifts and perfect boons that are from above, coming down from the Father of lights. Our A B C is a miracle of grace and love. Once we master it, the whole realm of thought is potentially ours, it is the key that unlocks the gate of heaven itself and takes us into the secret places of the Most High. In a song about God's Word the letters of the alphabet themselves are surely not unworthy of a place. That was one of earth's greatest days when man first thought of joining eyes to ears to make thought visible as well as audible.

While this arrangement of the lines of this Psalm was a help in the first place to the writer, it was a help also to all who should come after him. The first letters of the lines would fix them in the memory of saints and babes and sinners, in the same way as do the rhymes of our own metrical version. Do we not all feel we are on the road to remember a man's name when, though we forget the rest, we can say, " It begins with H," or " I know there's a K in it " ? So to a Hebrew the letters of the alphabet were

stepping-stones to higher things, and I cannot but think that the translators of the Psalms, both in the Authorized and the Revised Versions, and in our own metrical version, have greatly erred in not trying to preserve in our own language such a striking feature of the original. I am sure that in translating it as they have done they have not declared the whole counsel of God. Other scholars, as in the "Version by Four Friends," have shown that it can be done.

III. The third and, of course, the most noteworthy thing in this Psalm is that it is all about the Word of God. There are 176 verses in it, and in every one of these, excepting five, namely, verses 84, 90, 121, 122, 132, there is an explicit reference to the Word of God. There are nine different names given to that Word in it: ordinances, way, judgments, precepts, statutes, commandments, testimonies, law, and word, and these names are used so many times: ordinances, 1; way, 4; judgments, 20; precepts, 21; statutes, 21; commandments, 22; testimonies, 23; law, 24; and word, or words, no less than 142 times. That is to say, God's Word is referred to 278 times in 176 verses. Each of these names has its own special shade of meaning; each, like every star, has its own glory. Yet, taken all in all, with perhaps the exception of the last, they seem at first to have a cold, hard, harsh, forbidding look and sound. But the whole Psalm is just a love-song about God's law. Let me quote a few of its expressions. "I have rejoiced in the way of Thy testimonies as much as in all riches."

" I rejoice at Thy word as one that findeth great spoil." " The law of Thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver." " How sweet are Thy words unto my taste! Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" " I opened wide my mouth and panted, for I longed for Thy commandments." " Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage." And then, in simpler and far deeper words, yes, in the simplest and deepest of all human words, repeated time after time in a way that reminds us of Peter's answer to our Lord's oft-repeated question as He stood by the sea-shore after the resurrection, " I delight in Thy law," " I love Thy precepts," " I love Thy testimonies exceedingly," " Oh, how love I Thy law!"

Expressions like these, if they do not put us to shame, at the very least astonish us. You and I have the *whole* Word of God, the New Testament as well as the Old. We read a chapter or a portion once or twice a day, and are glad when we have done. Did the man who wrote the verses I have quoted really mean all that he said? And, if he did, what sort of man was he? Had he flesh and blood like us? Had he the common trials of men? Or was he the idle singer of an empty day, a man with a rich and happy life that never knew what trouble was, that had nothing to do but sit by his fire-side, or under a fig tree, or bask upon an Eastern roof with his Bible in his hand?

We do not know his name, or when he lived, but, let me tell you, he was a man of sorrows

and acquainted with grief. Let me read over to you some of his trials; and is there anybody here that has them all, or has one that he had not, or has any one of them in fuller measure or in greater degree? "I am small and despised." "Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me." "My soul is continually in my hand." "The wicked have laid a snare for me." "Princes sat and talked against me." "Take away from me reproach and contempt." "I am become like a bottle in the smoke." "The cords of the wicked have wrapped me round." "They have waited for me to destroy me." He was a man who had *living* sorrows. "My zeal hath consumed me, because they observe not Thy law." "It is time for the Lord to work, for they have made void Thy law." And above all, he was a man who had sinned, and had still in him the company of two armies. "Let not any iniquity have dominion over me." "Incline my heart not to covetousness." "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity." "Before I was afflicted I went astray." "I have gone astray like a lost sheep." Is there any one of us that can say more than that? Is there anyone that can say less?

Now, let us each draw the inference for ourselves. To every one of us Christ is now saying, as He thinks with agony unspeakable of the generations that are already lost, "Will ye also go away?" Be it ours to say, like Peter, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." God's commandments are not

grievous. They are good, good for the young and good for the old; good for the body, good for the mind, and good for the soul; good for prosperity, good for adversity; good for the living, good for the dying; good for the saved, good for those that are still lost; good for time, and good for eternity. There is no precept of God's law that is not the outcome of infinite wisdom and infinite love.

So says every one that has walked in His ways. So say even the ungodly. There is no bad man, no ungodly woman, who would not say, if you put it to them solemnly, "Whatever you do, don't do like me."

Above all, let me remind you that God keeps all these commandments Himself. They are the expression not only of His will, but of His character. The yoke He puts on us is the yoke He wears Himself.

It is a specially striking fact that this 119th Psalm follows the one He sang as He went out to Gethsemane and Gabbatha and Golgotha. Every commandment God asks us to keep, Christ kept. But there were special commandments laid on Him from all eternity, commandments compared with which, whether in intensity or in duration, the hardest we have to obey are not for one moment to be compared. His eternal life, His acceptance of the task of our salvation, His life on earth, His death, His sitting at the right hand of God, are all in the most literal sense the doing of the Father's will, the finishing of the work He gave Him to do.

And as He sang the 118th Psalm on His way to the Cross and the Grave, I think we may say there is much in the 119th that He must have sung on His way back. What is the 119th Psalm but a variation in all the letters of the alphabet, and in every style of music, of those words in the 40th Psalm, the first recorded words of Christ's that break the silence of eternity?

"To do Thy will I take delight,
O Thou My God that art;
Yea, that most holy law of Thine
I have within my heart."

The Holy Spirit bringing to Remembrance

The Holy Ghost shall bring all things to your remembrance.—John xiv. 26.

THE Lord Jesus Christ was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; acquainted with grief from the moment He was laid in the manger in the cattle stall in Bethlehem because there was no room for Him in the inn, till that hour when men cried out, "Away with Him, away with Him," because there was no room for Him in Jerusalem and no room for Him in His own habitable earth. The sorrows of His childhood must have been very great. The backwardness, the folly, the selfishness, the rudeness, the unkindness, the peevishness, the petulance, the temper, the unreasonableness of His playmates and companions must have grieved Him daily, continually; godly as His parents were—and I suppose there never was such a couple as Joseph and Mary—there must have come to Him very soon that knowledge, most awful to any child, but to Him overwhelmingly grievous, that they could do at times what was wrong and unworthy. But in addition to all that He suffered Himself, there was His share in the sufferings of others. We have all been touched at the kind way some little children have when one of their comrades

is hurt or grieved in any way. But what must it have been to see the sympathy, the compassion, the tenderness, the love of the holy child Jesus ?

This bearing of others' burdens, we may be sure, went on from day to day, till that dread hour came when God laid on Him that greatest of all burdens—*the iniquity of us all.*

Yet if our Lord was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, as no other ever was, He knew also, as no other ever did, the pleasures that are at God's right hand. His life was full of joy. He had meat to eat men knew not of. Till the hour came when God forsook Him on the Cross, we may be sure every hour brought some happiness. He drew water from the wells of salvation, such wells as the Old Testament Scriptures, the services of the synagogue, the morning and evening sacrifice of family worship. Many a well He dug for Himself as He passed through the Valley of Baca, digging it by meditation and prayer. But He drank also, as the 110th Psalm tells us, of " the brook that ran in the way." His eyes, His ears were ever open to the gracious sights and the wondrous melodies of which the world is so full that we see them as though we saw them not, and hear them as though we heard them not.

One of our Lord's greatest joys, I think, must have been the pleasure He had in revealing to His disciples the being and character and work of the Holy Ghost. Men knew something, they knew much, of God the Father, and Christ

came to reveal Him fully—He was the express image of the Father, the very effulgence of the Divine glory. But they knew almost nothing of the Holy Ghost.

We can all enter in some measure into the feelings—into the joy—of the man who after long searching and proving feels himself justified in announcing to the world a new discovery. What a moment of rapture that must be when a young chemist reads a paper to a little band of cientific men, in which he tells how he has found new element—a secret hidden from all past ages. What a moment when an astronomer discovers that our solar system is richer by a mighty planet, than we knew. What a moment when a man transmits his first letter, his first syllable, his first word, his first message, by a path which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture's eye hath not seen, bridging, annihilating space. How many such great moments there have been in the lives of men of science these past few years, as they made the bounds of knowledge wider. If that man deserves well of mankind, as Dean Swift said, who makes two ears of corn or two blades of grass to grow upon a spot of ground where only one grew before, what must be the happiness of one like Columbus, who unchained the broad Atlantic,

"Gave a new heaven, a new earth . . .
Who pushed his prows into the setting sun,
And made West East, and sail'd the Dragon's mouth,
And came upon the Mountain of the World,
And saw the rivers roll from Paradise."

No wonder the eyes of all men in the synagogue in Nazareth were fixed on Christ as He uttered the words, " The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach glad tidings to the poor." From all eternity, that is, for countless ages of ages, the Holy Ghost, like the Father and the Son, had loved the world, had given Himself for the world's salvation, and yet the world had not only not known the extent and measure of that love, but had scarcely even known of the existence of such a Being. And now it was Christ's glorious prerogative and task to open the very gates of Heaven and show that Heaven and God were immeasurably richer, immeasurably greater, than man had ever dreamt.

But a second great joy of Christ in connection with the Holy Ghost was this—He not only had the joy of revealing Him to men, He had the joy of Himself experiencing the teaching of the Holy Ghost.

Now think of what a joy that was. In His divine nature as God, our Lord had been and still was the same in substance and equal in power and glory with the Holy Ghost. He had shared with Him all His powers, all His thoughts, His fullest fellowship, from all eternity. In His divine nature there never had been a moment when there was less than equality; never a moment when there was less than perfect fulness of complete communion.

But now we draw near reverently and see a strange thing. The Eternal Son of God adds to His divine nature another nature, and that

a human one, and He who had been an equal sharer in all the thoughts of the Holy Ghost, now in our nature, as the Bible says, "emptied Himself," seated Himself, if I may say so, as a scholar upon the lowest form, and began as a learner at the beginning. I say that was an immeasurable joy to Christ, for it was the proof of His own love to the world. He gloried in His condescension, and well He might, for it was voluntary and it was infinite.

The Incarnation of our Lord not only doubled His nature, but it doubled—may we not say ?—the whole experience and joy of the Father and the Holy Ghost as well.

We have all felt in our lives the impossibility of combining into one all the experiences of life. There is a certain pleasure in the struggle to reach the greatest heights of fame, or scholarship, or wealth, or power ; there is a different pleasure in the actual attainment and enjoyment of these things when they have been won. It is a great thing to be born a king; it is a great thing to win a kingdom; but the two things are different, very widely different. The two feelings of joy cannot be experienced together. It is of the very essence of an earthly career that it fades away. It is not given to man to see both sides of any shield at once. But to Christ and to God, by the Incarnation, it has been made possible for Christ to be at once the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

And oh ! what a joy it must have been to our Lord in His human nature to enter into the

inheritance, to begin at the very beginning, to empty Himself, and then receive day by day, hour by hour, new, fresh, ever-increasing, constant accessions of the Holy Ghost. And what a joy to the Holy Ghost to be able to work all His work afresh from the first beginning till Christ uttered His triumphant cry, "It is finished!"

In the study of the outpouring of the Holy Ghost on Christ and His indwelling there is room for the highest and most loving powers of the devout imagination. In His human nature our Lord owed all He had to the Holy Ghost. It was the Holy Ghost who prepared Him that true, real, sinless, but human body. It was the Holy Ghost who endowed Him with a reasonable soul—that is, a rational mind and soul, with all its powers and faculties. That Spirit was poured out in full measure according to His daily work and need, and as It was never quenched and never rejected, so there were daily, hourly, varying, yet ever-increasing outpourings. There were moments in our Lord's life of greater trial and tension, for it was really human life. He prayed always earnestly, as earnestly as was necessary and possible, but there were greater necessities and possibilities at one time than at another, and so He prayed more earnestly—that is, the Spirit came in new and fuller abundance.

The operations of the Holy Ghost in our Lord's life were as many and as diverse as the circumstances of our Lord's being and life demanded.

It was the Holy Ghost that taught our Lord not only all His bodily requirements, but His mental and spiritual ones as well. It is the Holy Ghost that makes a little child cling to its mother's breast, and catch its mother's eye and smile when its mother sings. It is He who teaches us to think. But the text tells us it is the Holy Ghost who teaches us to remember—that is, who gives us the power of memory.

And here we may be sure—it is a wondrous thought—our Lord spoke from His own experience. There is no such thing, strictly speaking, as memory with God. All things that have ever happened are always present before Him. But more than that. There are things that you and I know, but we don't always remember them. There are thousands of people, hundreds of places, hundreds of things, that you and I are not thinking of at present. But we can recall them. There is forgetfulness that is sinful, that is the result of inattention, of carelessness, of heartlessness, a weakness of memory that is due to our profaning of our bodies and our minds, but there is a forgetfulness that is a necessary characteristic of human conditions. We can only do one thing at a time. Many of us here have been in Edinburgh, or Perth, or Inverness, but we weren't thinking of them till I mentioned them. We had in one sense forgotten them. But in no sense do they pass out of the memory of God. Two sparrows are sold for a farthing, yet not one of them is forgotten before God.

In our Lord there was no sinful forgetfulness,

but there was the sinless forgetfulness that is a condition of all human life. For example, our Lord slept, and was for the time unconscious, that is to say, forgetful of the world. His mind was with God, as always, but it slept as did His body. Indeed there is no sleep possible unless the mind sleeps, and so we say, " I slept none last night—I lay awake thinking."

The question of our Lord's growth in knowledge, and specially how He, the helpless babe, grew into the full comprehension of His oneness with God, and of His work on earth, is one of the most fascinating subjects that the human mind can dwell on. He grew, just as truly and as certainly as every baby grows, as Luke tells us, in stature and in wisdom. There was a time, if our Lord was a real man at all, when He did not know that Joseph was not His father. All this, of course, is a subject as difficult to deal with as it is profoundly fascinating. We don't understand the growth of our own minds, we do not know when you and I first realized our personality, much less are we able to enter into the nature of the growth of our Lord's comprehension of what was meant by " His Father's business."

But there can be no doubt that memory played a great part in it. His parents taught Him to speak, taught Him to pray, taught Him all they knew about God and the hope of Israel. They took Him to the synagogue, and He heard the Scriptures read, and wondered what the things meant. Line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, there a little—so He learnt—only

learning with a love and diligence that no mere man ever showed or ever felt. But just as you and I in childhood put 2 and 2 together, and things came back to us and became plain in the light of new experience, so our Lord rejoiced in this teaching of the Holy Ghost. And knowing what it was Himself, He rejoiced to tell us that we, too, are to receive a similar unction, a similar anointing, from the Holy Ghost. On our Lord's perfect but real humanity, as well as His eternal divinity, the world's redemption and God's being and throne and character depended. Night and day it was essential that our Lord should be free from sin and free from imperfection. Night and day Satan and all his hosts watched Him, and found nothing amiss in Him. The Holy Ghost had never been awanting, had never slumbered, had never slept, the end had been planned from the beginning, the Holy Spirit had not once failed.

This love of the Spirit was one of the mansions prepared for us, a mansion in which Christ Himself had found rest. It is a good land; let us go up and dwell in it.

I have spent longer than I meant in introducing my subject, and we have, as it were, lingered long, perhaps too long, in the porch of the temple. But if you have seen any of the beauty of the porch, you would willingly stay even longer, and you will certainly not refuse to press in further.

I want you to believe that in the field of memory the Spirit has a great work to do for every one

of us. The joy He had in teaching Christ He lives over again in teaching us, and He loves to do it for Christ's sake.

1. If the Holy Ghost is to bring things to remembrance, that assures us in the first place that He is with us now—that He is always with us. "From Thy Spirit whither shall I go?"

Believe that He has a plan, an object—that if things be unfinished in our lives it is not because He has not counted the cost, or changes His mind, but He is laying a deep and broad foundation. You have seen a schoolmaster tell the boys in a class to write down a certain sum; presently he is interrupted, or called away; slates are put past, books are taken out, the playbell sounds, the classes reassemble, and the boys think the master has forgotten what he did, but presently he says, "Take out your slates," and calls on one here and there to read out the sum he gave two hours ago. Happy the boy who can stand up and say, "I've got it, sir." So in the school of Providence—things happen to us that we do not understand; we learn texts and see no meaning in them, we hear sermons as though we heard them not; but God had a purpose in all He did and said, and that purpose will be made plain in time.

And a wonderful revelation it will be. What He did for Christ is not only the ground and guarantee, but is also the measure of what He will do for us. Our lives—the end of them—shall not be unworthy of the life of Christ. Every stone in the building will be worthy of the building.

2. I wish you to see the fulness of this fellowship of the Spirit. Not only is the Spirit with each one of us, but He is with us also for the sake of others. Our Lord says all He taught and did in any way would be brought back, gathered up and completed in the light of new experience and revelation. So He says to us, Tell one another things, do to one another things, that will explain themselves in days to come. Each one of us is thus called to be a fellow-worker with God. You who are parents, for example, may well be afraid when you think of the temptations that await your children. There are things you cannot speak of; the very mention of them would itself be a temptation. You can only read a chapter with them, or dwell upon a promise, or tell them something you have seen in life, and you can do no more. But do not lose heart. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows. Your boy will go out into the world, amongst strangers, amongst fiends in human shape—his home may be where Satan dwells, but the name of that place will be called Jehovah-Shammah, The Lord is there: and your boy will think of his mother's prayer, and hear his mother's stories, and see her smiles, and watch her tears, and remember all she said and did more vividly fifty years after she has been lying in the grave than on that far-off day when he sat beside her and leaned his head upon her breast and felt the touch of love in every fondling movement of her hands and in every trembling accent of her voice.

3. Third, and lastly, the passage surely tells us of a future when the Spirit will complete His work. How will He do it? How did He do it for Christ? Sometimes it may be by very gentle, loving providences; the Spirit will but breathe, as the snow disappears in an hour's time when the south wind blows; sometimes in storm and tempest, as the snow is driven away by lashing rain. By any way there will be great experiences—great trials, but greater mercies. And therefore the bigger the trials and the more, so much the bigger will be the mercies—till the last and most terrible experience of all comes, when sin and death and hell, fear and despair, and self-loathing and utter helplessness shall do their utmost against us, a few friends and a world of devils looking on, and in that hour, in the stream of memory that shall flow past, we shall find a smooth stone or two, a well-worn text, a Psalm, a hymn, that shall lay the giant low.

An Induction Address

I.—To the Minister

My only right to speak to you as I must now do is that which has been given to me in the command of the Presbytery. I have more need to give a charge to myself than to give one to you.

Let me tell you a few of the mistakes I have committed since I entered on the ministry.

The first visitor who came to my manse was a drunk man. My first feeling, as he sat down and proceeded on what seemed his aimless talk, was one of annoyance. As he went on, his words and manner became somewhat alarming, and my great anxiety was to get rid of him. I advised him to go home to his wife and children, quite willing that they should bear for many hours, for I suppose the hundredth time, a burden from touching which with my little finger, I shrank. I tried, and as I thought succeeded cleverly in getting him out of my room. When he stood on my outer step I shook hands with him once more, and repeated my good advice, the sum of which was simply—Depart, and be thou warmed and filled. But the man refused to let go my hand till he had spoken one word to me, a word I often smiled at long ago—may God forgive me for it—but a word I never smile

at now: "I am an old man," said he, "and you are a young man; and I have one advice to give you—Don't in future be quite so ready to show people to the door."

The slanderer, the backbiter, the talebearer, the man who glories, though it be under the pretence of great zeal for God or great sorrow for others—I say the man who glories over the faults of others either in life or doctrine; the man who always comes with a bad story and never with a good one; the man who makes you feel each time he leaves you that the world is a worse one than you thought it was, who is always lowering, by however little, your opinion of men in general and of saints in particular—show that man to the door, do not suffer *him* to dwell in your house or stand in your presence. But the poor sinner who does not know why he came, receive him in the name of God, receive him as you would like someone to receive your brother if you had a brother that was out of the way.

It was one of the busiest of Cambridge scholars who used to say that his time was not his, but God's; and if any man came, he considered that God sent him, and that that man had a claim upon his time. I can wish you no greater honour than this—that the erring and the weak should come to see you, having perhaps no excuse but this, that God sent them and they had nowhere else to go. And you will perhaps say, "A whole hour gone!" Perhaps in that hour you may win a whole eternity.

The worse the man, the more hopeless, so much

the greater will be his claim on you. If it should be said of anyone that he has lain thirty and eight years in sin, let it never be said that no man, and specially no minister, was willing to stand by till the angel troubled the pool, and help him in.

I said that after that man reproved me on my own doorstep, I often smiled at it; and sometimes I told it, not altogether, but partly, as a piece of humour. May I entreat you never to make light of sin? I do not speak of drunkenness with any special reference—I mention it as one of many sins—but I hope you will never see any humour or any fun in sin. Not that I speak slightingly of humour: I bless God that it is possible for us to laugh; I bless Him that He takes *all* our burden at times and makes it possible for us to laugh. I say I look on laughter and the gift of humour as one of the richest gifts that God has given us—one of the gifts, like sleep, that He has given us which angels do not need, for they are never weary and they never faint and they see His face. But oh, never laugh at sin, never joke about a drunkard or a young person that has marred his life. I used to laugh at drunkenness—at the humours of it. I was—I bless God—a teetotaller all my days; but I say I laughed at drunkenness sometimes when I began my ministry. I thank God I cannot laugh at it now. But that lesson was not lightly learnt. Pray God to give you a great sense of the awfulness of sin. Let every young person's honour and purity be as dear to you as that of your

nearest friend would be. Sin brought the Redeemer to the Cross, and it has darkened all eternity for God.

But while every sinner becomes your charge, you will specially be kind to those of whom God has given you the oversight. They receive you with open arms to-day, with kindly affection, or at least with kindly curiosity. Small as your congregation is, they will not be all saints; but in a little time, if not already, there will be some to whom your heart goes out more willingly than it does to others. Let me give you the one rule for visiting that I have learnt, or rather that I might have learnt. I have paid a big price for the lesson, whether I have learnt it or not. Call oftenest, call soonest, on the people on whom you do not wish to call.

So I say, Try most to save those whom you imagine to be somewhat hostile. Call specially on any young people who seem as though they did not want you. I do not mean you to thrust yourself on them—I know you will not—but don't let them imagine for one moment that you are careless or indifferent about them.

Four years ago I was asked to see a lad who was dying. He was only twenty, I think barely twenty. He was one of my people, but he neither attended Bible Class nor Prayer Meeting, nor was he always in church on the Sabbath day; and I thought he did not care for me. But he sent for me when he was dying. He had married seventeen days before, had married a heartless fool, to whom the pain and agony of her husband

seemed the slightest possible concern. He was but a boy—dying, attended only by the mother whose home he had left, and whose love he had put second, and death was staring him in the face. Can I ever forget how he wept—poor boy that he was—and how he said, "Do you think God will forgive me?" I can now say without fear that I think God did forgive him and that the rough road by which he had to go was one that led to Christ. But as I gazed at him I saw how much affection I had lost, and how much sin I might have stayed. But after he was dead, when I was trying to comfort his mother—and I bless God that she is still my friend, but I marvel at the grace—she said words to me that I trust no mother will ever say to you: "I sometimes thought that if you had taken a little more notice of Jamie, things might have been different."

I know that you will preach with all your might, and pray with all your might, and visit with all your might: let me affectionately entreat you to watch your own soul and ask God to keep you in all your ways. The temptations of life do not get weaker as one gets older—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, the pride of life—your battle with them will get fiercer as you get older. The prayer that all of us need to offer up in view of old age, if God should give us it, is not a prayer to be kept from poverty, or the poorhouse, or the grudging charity of friends, but the prayer, "Keep me from secret faults; deliver me from presumptuous sins." It was an aged man, and an aged saint, who said, "An

old man's heart is the devil's busiest workshop." Watch your heart, then, as you get older day by day, shut the door of your life, close your eyes, let no wrong imagination dwell ever in your heart. It is these things that tell on a minister's life and mar his work.

A great living scholar, addressing the chief schoolmasters of England, reminded them of the old saying that most of the people in the world whom we meet, we meet for only twenty minutes. In those few minutes they form their lifelong estimate of us. You dare never be off your guard. Some man may be getting his only look at you.

When I was a boy of nine or ten I was taken to hear a lecture by a minister of world-wide reputation, the kindliest of men, the most genial, the hardest-working, the most self-sacrificing. He had given a half-promise for some far-off date, and, as men do, they had claimed its fulfilment when it suited them without consulting his convenience or the exigencies of his work; but as he began this lecture, he spoke a few words of reproof to them, and showed some signs of irritation. What his lecture was about I have not the faintest recollection, but it must have been a lecture such as few men living, either then or now, could give. I remember only the touch of anger and of temper in his opening sentences.

But whether someone see you in an unguarded moment or not, the world will see and feel the effects of these unguarded moments. Of all

men in the world, a minister should be at every moment of his life as one who has come out of the King's palaces, whose garments have the smell of aloes, myrrh and cassia; and as no man can drag himself, so no man can drag the whole profession to which he belongs, lower down than can a minister. The banker, the lawyer, the artisan, the engineer, the sailor, may do what they like : men don't say, "There's a sailor for you!" His profession does not suffer; but that's what they say of a minister, for he stands apart, on a distinctly higher, on an immeasurably higher, platform than an ordinary man.

He represents Christ and the things that are in heavenly places. Remember that you have your own character, the character of your church, of your brethren in the Christian ministry, in your keeping, but remember above all, that you have charge of the character of Christ. Men and women, boys and girls and little children, saints and sinners will imagine God to be exactly what you are. If you and I are unfaithful, no man will be beaten with more stripes both here and hereafter.

But let me rather anticipate for you the joys that belong to the faithful Christian minister. Think of the affection that you win from those whom you have helped in any way to God. There are great moments in the history of a warrior, as when he enters the capital in triumph with the men whom he has led to victory; it is a great moment in a way when a statesman is cheered by his party in the senate, or by the fickle

mob who hissed and hooted at him yesterday and will hoot him to-morrow unless they have quite forgotten him; but the minister who brings men to Christ has such a triumph as angels might envy. He represents for the moment all that is highest in the Highest Himself —the very love of God to man. Think of the loving memory that will be yours—think of those who will give you a place in their most solemn thoughts, at their most solemn moments, alike in life and death. I was witness of a minister's joy when a message came to him from a girl who had died in the very beginning of her youthful pride and joy. "Tell the minister," she said, "that I feared no evil, for Christ was with me."

Think of the fame you will have in heaven even whilst you live. If there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, joy amongst the angels in the presence of God, do you think the name of the man who helped him, if he be a good man, will not be proclaimed as well? There can be no doubt of it. And when at last the faithful minister is carried by angels, he will be amazed at the welcome that awaits him, not only the welcome such as a stranger might get for the sake of the Lord who had counted him worthy, but the welcome he will get as one well known, whose sermons were repeated and whose labours were recorded in the better land, whose prayers made fragrant the very throne of God. "Whence knowest thou me?" will be the wondering cry of many a godly man when he enters heaven and finds himself greeted by name;

and then he will discover that his good report, and the sinners he was enabled to save, have gone before him, and that when he was praying and striving and perhaps despairing under his lonely fig-tree, his name was a household word in heaven.

II.—To the Congregation

Some of us here can remember the time when we thought a minister's life, if not exactly an easy life, yet a very safe one, one that had none of the difficulties that the lives of ordinary men have. We were little children then, and understood as children and spoke as children. We thought he had few trials, if any; a pat of his hand brightened a whole day for us; we thought he was encompassed by love and reverence; that he was far removed from temptation; and if he had trials, was he not sure of heaven, and did that not make all the difference in the world between him and ordinary men?

I do not know that a Cameronian minister has more trials than other ministers. He has different trials, that is all. But let me tell you, if you do not know it, that a minister is one who is tempted in all points like yourselves. He has the faults of his own temperament, he has the bodily trials, the mental trials, the spiritual trials, that are common to ordinary men; the shame and chastisement that are the due reward of the sins of his earlier years; the burden of the present, all the heavier that no one knows it because he

cannot tell it; and the burden of the future. But as a minister he has other trials greater than those of ordinary men because his sins are greater and he deserves them, and his work is greater and he needs them. If the devil does not ask his captains to shoot only at your leader, you may be sure he will bid them shoot specially at him. A minister's fall means more than the fall of one man.

You may take it as certain that your minister, like every other minister, and like his Master, will be a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He can only teach you what he has learnt himself. And if any Sabbath day or prayer-meeting night he seems to speak with unusual power, be sure that he paid a great price for that freedom; he got all that in the furnace. The mansions that God by him prepares for you have their foundations laid in tears and blood. The things most worth telling are not got in college, or in books, or in the study, or in travel; they are to be got only on the Hill Difficulty and in the Valley of Humiliation.

You are to remember above all things, that your minister will have to bear the burden of souls. To this task it is you that have called him; in this work you must everyone help him, as a true yoke-fellow. How can you do this ?

First of all by helping and honouring the whole body of the ministry, that is, by helping every other true minister of Christ in this town and countryside. It is a great mistake to think you can help your minister by disparaging others :

a still greater mistake to imagine that your minister would gain anything by being surrounded by ministers who should deserve to be disparaged. There are godly ministers here besides yours. Do all you can to help them. No congregation gains by the weakness of another. No minister is helped by the inefficiency of another. If the apostles were to rise from the dead and become ministers in this town, leaving only, say, this one little church to an ordinary man, as the other churches got full, this one would get full, too. You don't fill one church by emptying another; but by compelling the people in the highways and hedges—that is, those who are in no church—to come in. Raise the temperature, natural or spiritual, in any part of the town, and the whole town will be the gainer.

Let me affectionately warn you, my brethren, against the sin of fault-finding. Maintain your own testimony ; be loyal to your own church ; keep your own banner floating high; but remember you are but one regiment, or one little troop, in the army of the Lord. Testify against every error, but don't lose a sense of the proportion of things. There are some things greater than others; some truths more important than others —infinitely more important. And if you must testify, remember that a witness has to tell not only the truth, and nothing but the truth, but the whole truth as well. The people who disagree with you in some things, agree with you in the main thing. I was brought up in a little congregation and heard all my boyhood about de-

fections and inconsistencies and departures from the truth. But since I became a man I have found out that there were saints in the next street; heroes in the neighbouring churches; missionaries who afterwards laid down their lives for Christ—who came as visitors to our city. I never heard one word about them. It is not pleasant for me to say that ; but it would be wrong in me on such a solemn day as this not to open all my heart, and if I cannot in any measure deliver you from the narrowmindedness and censoriousness and spiritual pride that are, not as some imagine, the great principles of our Church, but have been the curse of our Church—if I cannot save you from them, I can at least protest against them.

By this, and by this only, do we know that we love God, because we love the brethren. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, you may call him a man true to his principles, a sound, faithful man—the apostle John calls him a liar.

You are to remember that your minister has got a character. If he says things that are truth, don't call him a traitor. The man who becomes a Cameronian minister has given hostages to fortune; he deserves at least to get some credit for earnestness and sincerity. Judge him kindly. If he passes you on the street some day without recognition, remember it is possible he may not have seen you; thou thyself hast passed others unintentionally : don't forget the ninety-nine times when he did speak. If he passes your door six times running without

calling, remember that you yourselves do not call on everybody whom you know every time you are even out for pleasure; far less when you are bent on special errands. Remember that a minister has to try to help sinners. If he calls a hundred times on one, it is because he needs to do it. And a minister cannot defend himself.

" I don't know what on earth our minister gets to do with his time. I see him going along that road twice every day; but he never seems to have time to call on me; I suppose it's because I'm a poor man and he likes to take tea with the rich-folk." The man who said that said it once too often; but it was not the minister who reproved him : it was a poor woman, who said, " It is to keep your brother out of the public-house that he has to go that road so often."

Pray for your minister once a week at any rate: if you wish a blessing you'll do it every day: many times a day.

Do you wish to please and honour him ? Don't give him a present. I don't know whether you give presents to your minister or not in this district, but I know that in every other part of Scotland it is some officious person who usually starts the thing, and when the minister protests against it, he is invariably told that no one was asked, that everybody gave willingly, and that indeed some were ill-pleased at not being asked. That's always said, and it is hardly ever true, though I have no doubt the people who say it believe it to be true. There are some who give

because, though they cannot afford it, they think that if they do not give the minister will imagine they do not care for him. Some give to cover a multitude of sins and gain a little glory. But in almost every case I ever knew, six months afterwards the minister got something from his people that made the gift look somewhat strange. But this I say by permission and not by commandment.

Trust your minister. Look kindly and attentively at him. If you are not pleased with him, either say so honestly and respectfully, or wait a little and suspend your judgment, and pray for him. Avoid above all things the look of indifference or the slightest gesture of contempt. An insolent toss of the head may break your minister's heart when nothing else will.

The greatest honour you can pay him is to be godly men and women. If you are dishonest, slow at paying debt, untruthful, uncharitable, disobliging, mean, obstinate, unreasonable, pettish, sulky, people will say, "Aye, that is one of Mr. So-and-so's people." But if you are godly men and women, honest, hard-working, true, unselfish, willing to do anything to bring a soul to Christ, making the salvation of men your one concern, then you will bring honour to your minister and to his Master here ; and whatever crown they get hereafter you will share it with them.

God's Grace to Paul

But by the grace of God I am what I am.—1. Cor. xv. 10.

If you were to ask a man what a certain thing was, and he were to say, Well, it is just what it is, you would naturally say, That doesn't tell me much—it leaves me where I was—I knew that before. You would be entitled to say to him, Do you not know yourself what it is? or are you not at liberty to tell me? or have you not the time? or am I incapable of understanding it? or am I unworthy to know it? So here, as a description of a man, nothing apparently could be more vague or less definite than the words *I am what I am*. The words themselves bring you no further forward. They leave you where you were. I am what I am—yes, but that is just what I was asking—*What are you?* Yet, vague and indefinite and at first sight unsatisfactory as they are, one cannot help feeling that there is a ring of reality, of actuality, a sense of power, about them; they describe a being, not a nonentity. There is something in them that stands up and says to all the world—This was a man!

There is something in the form of the expression that at once recalls, and at the same time makes us afraid to say it recalls, that unspeakably awful description of God by Himself: "And

Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you, and they shall say unto me, What is His name? what shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I am That I am: and He said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you." These wonderful words tell us much; they proclaim the incomprehensibility of God, His infinite greatness; but they proclaim as with the great and solemn beats of a chime that is meant to strike the ear and heart of every creature in the universe, and a chime that is to reverberate throughout eternity—I say they proclaim first and foremost of all, the Being of God—God *is*. He is not a lying vanity like the gods of the nations which have mouths but they speak not, eyes have they but they see not, noses have they but they smell not, they have hands but they handle not, feet have they but they walk not, neither speak they through their throat. *Our* God is in the heavens —He is a living and true God.

And just as the Psalmist says of these false gods, They that make them are like unto them, so they, whose God Jehovah is, become *like Him*. They share His being. They *live*. To know God is everlasting life, and hence a saint can humbly appropriate in his own measure these words. God says, I am That I am; and the believer can say with grateful and adoring amazement and abasement, And by the grace of God *I* am what I am.

"You don't know what I've been," said the great Rabbi Duncan to Principal Brown, of Aberdeen—"You don't know what I've been, but I will tell you. To such a depth of scepticism had I sunk that, one day, on seeing a horse passing, I said to myself, There is no difference between that horse and me." "Very well," said his friend to him; "but the question is—Where are you now?" "Well," he replied, "it was a Dr. Mearns that brought me out of that atheism, and from that time forward I have never doubted the existence of a personal God. And when I was convinced that there was a God, I danced on the Brig o' Dee at Aberdeen with delight."

While it is true we can neither search out the Almighty to perfection, nor search out any of His creatures who by His grace become His heirs, and so, like Him, yet we can in some measure describe Him. We know a few of His attributes. We can draw out a little the contents of that wonderful verb *to be*, and we can say something about such a man as Paul.

Paul's description of himself here—"By the grace of God"—may remind us of what is known as the proper style of the King of our own country. There is a recognized authoritative description of himself in all royal documents—"Edward VII, by the grace of God, King of Great Britain and Ireland, and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India." That is a high-sounding roll of titles, and might mean *anything*. There is *no* limit to the opportunities such a man might have

for hastening the kingdom of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ. A godly King of Britain, a man to whom Christ would be all and in all—what might he not do! Yet, taken even at their best, they are not worthy to be compared for one moment with the official description of this man Paul—"Paul called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God." There's honour for you, more high than kings of any land.

"I have been writing letters all forenoon," said a great scholar and prelate of the English Church, the late Bishop Thirlwall. "Three of them were of importance; the rest could all have been written by my butler." So I suppose a king's hardest work is signing his name to documents. I fancy he has whole hours of that right on end at times. A footman with an india-rubber stamp could do it all as well, and much more expeditiously. These royal titles, keep in mind, are conferred for nothing; the Sovereign assumes them all the moment the breath passes out of his predecessor's body. And he wears them all and claims them all to his own last breath. I say these titles may mean something; just as truly, they may not. In the past they have oftener meant nothing than anything. But "apostle of Jesus Christ" is a title that is won and worn, it means something—it means a thousand-fold more than "Emperor of India" or "Czar of all the Russias" would mean at their very best.

For to be an apostle meant that one had seen God manifest in flesh and raised up in glory;

it meant that one was a witness of the Resurrection. It meant that one was one of the foundation stones on which the Church and Kingdom of Christ was for time and for eternity to be built; and Paul's special work as apostle involved this, that he was to unfold for all ages, as no other did, as not even our Lord did, the meaning of the mystery of redemption. His it was to explain the secret of the Lord, how it was *needful*, absolutely needful, that before one sinner could be saved the Son of God must be appointed from all eternity to become manifest in flesh, live and suffer like any other man, and then endure the wrath of God for us and be hanged upon the Cross, and lie in the grave, and be raised up to sit at God's right hand. The epistles of Paul are the noblest work of the human mind and of human hands. And their writer bears a singularly close and dear relationship to every saint that has lived these 1900 years in New Testament times, and to all the generations that shall follow them through the many centuries that have yet to come and go till time shall be no more. Here is a sovereignty of *love* in comparison with which all earthly kingdoms and empires are but tiny provinces and all earthly reigns but the fleeting pageants of a December day.

But, thirdly, the text implies not only a life that is real, and that has special, stupendous tasks to do, it implies character and continuity of character. In the case of the apostle—"By the grace of God I"—that implies that he nothing common did or mean. Whether

for the moment he was a prisoner, or a tent-maker, or a passenger in a boat, arguing with Stoics, praying with broken-hearted sinners, writing epistles or gathering sticks, speaking of Christ crucified and the realms of glory, or shivering in the cold and writing for his old cloak, but especially for the parchments—I say, again, he was always an apostle; whatever record leap to light he never shall be shamed.

But, fourthly, the text implies change of character—a contrast, a tremendous contrast between what is and what had been. I suppose every king, unless he is an utter fool or a shameless profligate, becomes a different man when he becomes a king. He assumes a certain state, asserts his dignity; now that he is become a man he must put away some childish things at least. To every king God gives, God offers, as He did to Saul, another heart. He opens as it were a door that has been hitherto concealed and shows him that that is but the ante-room—

> " Palatial gloomy chambers for parade
> And passage lengths of lost significance"—

ante-rooms to something infinitely grander, ante-rooms that lead into the very palace of the King. I say He lets them feel what another heart is that they may seek still another and another till they get the new heart.

That new heart was what Paul had got. And when he thought of all that he had been —outwardly moral, but all the same a blasphemer,

and injurious, a persecutor, a murderer, one that harried the Church of Christ, and drove bad men further down the steeps—when he thought of himself as a proud, vain, hard man who thought he kept the law and had a righteousness of his own—still more when he thought of all that he might have been and of all that he had wished to be—he was filled with adoration and amazement—" I am what I am." Oh the contrast these words brought up before his mind! Surely nothing but free grace, undeserved free grace, infinite, undeserved free grace, could have brought about so great a change. The chief of sinners now chief of the apostles. He whose glory and ambition it was to hold the clothes of the men who hurled the stones at Stephen, feeling bitterly that hour, as he had never felt before, the smallness of his stature, and the meagre strength of a scholar's arm—I say that man whose passion was raised to boiling point when Stephen said, " I see Jesus standing at the right hand of God," to think that he of all men, and alone of all men, should have been caught up into that very Paradise and been permitted to hear the prayers and praises of the ransomed, and the prayers and praises of their Redeemer.

Fifthly, the words suggest the thought of permanence. As " I am That I am " is the name of the unchanging and unchangeable God, so " I am what I am " means that if He is mine and I am His, it is for ever and for ever. " Who are you ? " the story goes, was what a soldier said to a King of Sweden who was dying on the

field of battle; and the answer came—"I *was* the King of Sweden." A dandy and a man of letters has told us in his diary that the most impressive moment at the burial of one of the last of our English kings was that when, as the coffin was lowered into the vault, the Lord Chamberlain read the long list of his titles, and then cried, "*Sic transit*"—so passes the world's glory. Or, to take a third illustration of one of the commonest of all commonplaces : a great Danish writer, who was in Paris when the Franco-Prussian War broke out in 1870, bears witness to the rapidity with which the French Empire was overthrown. At the beginning of the war one of the most popular of French writers, Edmond About, began an article with these words : "In the happy reign of the Third Napoleon, as people used to put it, I have seen Alsace overrun by the enemy's troops." Two or three days later, he talks of "the *last Bonaparte*," and then apologizes for speaking like a countryman. There are names which are now no more mentioned in Paris than if they belonged to the twelfth century. And then this writer gives his own experience : "What do the French say about their Emperor now? Why, if I were to ask any of my French friends that, they would reply, 'Say? My dear, we never speak of him. You know as well as I do that he is out of the reckoning now.'"

Compare with this the inheritance of the saints. Paul is daily winning kingdoms, opportunities, fame, for other men, but his own greatness suffers

no detraction. Paul has never lost one friend; each hour that passes adds but to the number of his friends. His words have been read in a hundred thousand sanctuaries to-day, and will be read in ten thousand more before the sun begins another daily course. His words have been read in millions of homes and gripped to a hundred million hearts on earth. But who can speak of the love and reverence and gratitude felt towards him by every one amongst the countless redeemed, whether they died before or since the coming of our Lord?

And has not God spoken concerning Paul for a great while to come? What glory awaits him here on earth as the number of the elect is daily added to! Long centuries after every Christian house of prayer that is now on earth has been emptied of the children and the children's children of generations yet unborn, when all the names by which the Church of Christ is known have passed into merited oblivion, and all her divisions are healed, there will be noble congregations in every part of the earth listening to mightier preachers than men have ever seen, as they open up the length and breadth and height and depth of the words of this great man of God.

And what shall one say of that love and affection and admiration which shall follow him as he and we follow Christ together all through eternal ages? And what shall Paul himself say, as he gazes at the crowns he wears and the realms he rules, but—By the grace of God I am what I am?

And the grace that has made, and still makes, and ever will make, this the burden of Paul's song—that same grace is offered to you and me to-day. And by that grace we are every one of us what we are. We might have been left to our worst desires, our worst moments might have been our last. To-day there is no one here who but for grace would have fallen into hopeless sin and shame, and there are some of us that could not have complained had we now been lifting up our eyes in Hell. By His grace we are what we are—listening, it may be against our wills, but still listening to the offer of pardon, the offer of mercy, the offer of justification, adoption, sanctification. We are here on treating terms with God, salvation to be had for the taking. But shall we rest satisfied with that? By the grace of God I am what I am—not far from the kingdom of God. Shall we not add, before I close, the sentence: By the grace of God I am what I am—I am in the kingdom—I am in Christ from henceforth and for ever?

The Chapters of the Bible

THE Bible was first divided into its present chapters in the thirteenth century, and into its present verses by Robert Stephens, the printer, in the middle of the sixteenth.

In the Old Testament there are 929 chapters, and 23,214 verses, or an average of about 25 to each chapter. In the New Testament the numbers are 260, and 7,959, being an average of a little over 30.

The Revised Version of the Bible, of which the New Testament portion was issued on the 17th May, 1881, and the Old Testament on the 19th May, 1885, is divided, on the other hand, like every other book, into paragraphs, of which in the Old Testament there are about 2,250, and in the New about 950.

In the Authorized Version there are in the—

Windows in Heaven

Old Test.	New Test.			
1 chap.	—	having	2	vers.
4 chaps.	—	,,	3	,,
1 chap.	—	,,	4	,,
9 chaps.	—	,,	5	,,
12 ,,	—	,,	6	,,
10 ,,	—	,,	7	,,
16 ,,	1	,,	8	,,
17 ,,	—	,,	9	,,
19 ,,	2	,,	10	,,
20 ,,	2	,,	11	,,
24 ,,	1	,,	12	,,
31 ,,	7	,,	13	,,
27 ,,	7	,,	14	,,
25 ,,	6	,,	15	,,
22 ,,	6	,,	16	,,
37 ,,	8	,,	17	,,
32 ,,	14	,,	18	,,
20 ,,	3	,,	19	,,
31 ,,	9	,,	20	,,
32 ,,	17	,,	21	,,
53 ,,	5	,,	22	,,
39 ,,	7	,,	23	,,
27 ,,	7	,,	24	,,
32 ,,	14	,,	25	,,
21 ,,	6	,,	26	,,
32 ,,	8	,,	27	,,
26 ,,	7	,,	28	,,
27 ,,	7	,,	29	,,
21 ,,	6	,,	30	,,
34 ,,	8	,,	31	,,
21 ,,	4	,,	32	,,
23 ,,	7	,,	33	,,
23 ,,	5	,,	34	,,
21 ,,	5	,,	35	,,
14 ,,	3	,,	36	,,
12 ,,	4	,,	37	,,
12 ,,	6	,,	38	,,
5 ,,	5	,,	39	,,
11 ,,	7	,,	40	,,
4 ,,	4	,,	41	,,

Old Test.	New Test.			
3 chaps.	5	having	42	vers
11 ,,	3	,,	43	,,
6 ,,	3	,,	44	,,
4 ,,	1	,,	45	,,
7 ,,	3	,,	46	,,
4 ,,	4	,,	47	,,
2 ,,	3	,,	48	,,
6 ,,	1	,,	49	,,
2 ,,	4	,,	50	,,
5 ,,	2	,,	51	,,
3 ,,	3	,,	52	,,
2 ,,	2	,,	53	,,
3 ,,	2	,,	54	,,
3 ,,	—	,,	55	,,
1 ,,	3	,,	56	,,
3 ,,	1	,,	57	,,
1 ,,	2	,,	58	,,
1 ,,	2	,,	59	,,
— ,,	1	,,	60	,,
— ,,	—	,,	61	,,
— ,,	1	,,	62	,,
2 ,,	—	,,	63	,,
1 ,,	—	,,	64	,,
1 ,,	—	,,	65	,,
2 ,,	1	,,	66	,,
1 ,,	—	,,	67	,,
1 ,,	—	,,	68	,,
— ,,	—	,,	69	,,
1 ,,	—	,,	70	,,
— ,,	2	,,	71	,,
1 ,,	1	,,	72	,,
1 ,,	—	,,	73	,,
— ,,	1	,,	75	,,
— ,,	1	,,	80	,,
1 ,,	—	,,	81	,,
1 ,,	—	,,	89	,,
1 ,,	—	,,	176	,,
929	260	(Total).		

Most of us, I fear, have reason, like the famous Thomas Fuller, to confess with shame before God that the first thing we do when we begin to read a chapter, either at home or in the church, is to look at the end of it to see whether it is a long one or not, and if it is a short one we are greatly pleased. We can all of us sympathize with Jean the maid in *The Little Minister*, who had a little grudge in her heart when her "daily portion"—as they call now-a-days what Thomas Boston would have called his "ordinary"—happened to be a very long chapter on the evening of a washing day.

Now the list given above shows this at least, that there are far more short chapters in the Bible than long ones. More than half of those in the Old Testament have under 24 verses; one half of those in the New have under 28. In the Old Testament there are only 38, and in the New 29, which have 50 or more verses; and of these there are only 6 in the Old Testament and 5 in the New which have 70 or more. These 11 are Ezra 2; Psalm 78; Nehemiah 7; 1 Chronicles 6; Numbers 7; Psalm 119; John 6; Luke 22; Mark 14; Matthew 26; and Luke 1.

And who that reads them would wish any one of these to be one whit shorter? For of the six in the Old Testament, one gives the names and dwelling-places of the Priests and Levites, who were dear to God's heart because they were the types of His well-beloved Son who dwelt in His bosom from all eternity; two give the names of the captives who came from

exile at His bidding, and the very numbers of their cattle; one describes what God did for His people in the wilderness; and one, with strange reiteration, tells how much they did for Him. Of the five in the New Testament, one is that in which Christ calls Himself the bread of life, which closes with the solemn words, "Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered Him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life"; one describes the story of our Saviour's birth; and three tell the story of His agony in the Garden and His trial before Pilate. And as if to make us ashamed of our unwillingness to listen to our Father's voice, the longest of all chapters in the Bible, the 119th Psalm, is one asseveration, a hundred and three score and sixteen times repeated, of the sweetness and preciousness of the Word of God. The second longest in the Bible by actual count of words, though other thirteen have more verses, is, I think, the 8th chapter of 1st Kings. It is the one which contains Solomon's prayers at the dedication of the Temple, and the fact that they are recorded at such length is surely significant of the delight God has in prayer, and ought to be a great encouragement to us all to come often to the throne of grace.

The London officials of the National Bank of Scotland were proud on what they reckoned a great occasion some time ago because in one delivery they received 18,000 letters, a number unequalled in this country in the history of any

firm. And shall we be most happy when God says *least* to us? The men who laid the first Atlantic Cable in 1858 were glad in heart when it spoke its first message: "Europe and America are united by telegraphic communication. Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good-will to men." And shall we grudge to listen to the voice that binds heaven to earth?

There is not a single *word*, not a single *letter*, in the Bible, if we rightly looked at it, that does not bring glad tidings of great joy to us, for it proves beyond all doubt that there is no gulf fixed as yet between us and God; He and we are still on speaking terms.

An Invalid of the Right Sort

And Hezekiah said unto Isaiah, What shall be the sign that the Lord will heal me, and that I shall go up into the house of the Lord the third day?—2 Kings xx. 8

One Monday evening a few weeks ago a minister whom I met told me he had just finished making an unusual series of calls. "There were eight of our office-bearers absent from church yesterday," he said, "men that are always there, and I knew they must be ill, and I have just seen the last of them—in bed, like all the other seven!"

Every congregation, one is glad to say, has people of that kind, members and adherents who would no more think of staying away from church either forenoon or afternoon, if they are able to stand on their feet, than they would think of doing without their meals or having a day off from their daily work. These people, when they have to stay at home, once or twice in a lifetime, tell us afterwards how strange and solemn it seemed to them, as they lay in bed, to hear the church bells ringing, and remember the days "how I went with the throng, and led them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday." And when the doctor comes to see them through the week their invariable question is, "Shall I be able to get to the church on Sabbath?" just as

other people ask if they will be fit for their work on Monday. We all know, too, what answer some doctors will give. "You mustn't dream of going to church; you couldn't do a more foolish thing; stay in the house, but if the day is extra fine you may take a little turn either forenoon or afternoon; a short walk will do you good; and on Monday you can go to your office in the forenoon, but don't stay more than three hours." That is the kind of doctor most of us like.

Hezekiah, one may presume, had as much to do as most of us. There is no king that has not routine work enough to keep him busy for several hours every day. He would have his treasurer, his recorder, his secretary, to meet. He would have petitions and appeals to read, and hear, and consider. Yet he does not say, "What shall be the sign that the Lord will heal me, and that I shall resume business, and clear off arrears, and attend to affairs of state, and grant interviews to ambassadors?" but "that I shall go up to the house of the Lord?" God was not only in all his thoughts, but first in them.

Many a one, further, if he had been in Hezekiah's position, would have reasoned thus: "If I go up to the house of the Lord on the third day after letting it go abroad that I was 'sick unto death,' people will say I must have been making a great ado about nothing, exaggerating as usual; they will say it is so like a king to make the most of everything about himself, and they will never believe a word I say again. They will

even say there was no miracle in the matter; if I had been as ill as Isaiah said I shouldn't have been able to go about when the third day came."

There are some troubles, of course, that pass away slowly, others come to a head and are then over almost before we know it. I have been told that Sir Lauder Brunton, one of the best-known physicians of our time, thinks that the illness Hezekiah suffered from was quinsy, or tonsillitis, an extremely painful, but only occasionally fatal, throat trouble. He bases this belief, in part, on those words: " Like a crane or a swallow, so did I chatter "—an argument that will appeal to those who have heard a sufferer from quinsy trying to speak, and unable to do so distinctly, because all the muscles used in speech are in an inflamed condition. Quinsy is one of those troubles in which, once they come to a head, relief comes almost in a few moments. The weakness resulting from the seven or eight or ten days' fever and pain and want of food and sleep may last for weeks, but the patient is a new man instantly and able both to think and speak and do some work. Whether this was Hezekiah's trouble or not, he certainly set an example to all people who turn ill. When they get better the house of God should be not the very last but the very first place they long to go to. Yet we have all known people who, when asked why they don't come to church, ask us if we have forgotten how ill they were in July eighteen months ago, when they were a

whole fortnight off their work—"Don't you remember that?"

One has known people who not only never stayed away from church if they were able to crawl out of bed, but people who, if they had to go from home on business or pleasure, made a point of coming back for Sabbath-day, especially if their church or their minister was having a time of trial or struggle. That kind of person belongs, no doubt, to a species of Christian that is almost extinct in our country, and one is perhaps scarcely entitled to look for such faith upon the earth. But I would say this, that if there is any man or woman who finds during his annual holiday that there is no body of God's people within a dozen miles with whom he can join in prayer or praise, it is that person's duty to choose another holiday resort where he will be able to keep the Sabbath according to the commandment; and if fellowship anywhere else than in his own congregation be impossible, *if he is in earnest in what he says*, he will come home on Saturday night with his family and go back on the Monday. One thing no right-thinking man will do; he will not sit in his house and compel his landlady and his neighbours to say, "These are just like the majority of our summer visitors; I don't know their reasons, but I do know this, that they never enter a church door all the time they are here."

The Lord's Anointed

This shall be an holy anointing oil unto Me throughout your generations.—Exodus xxx. 31.

The earliest name given to our Saviour is, of course, the name My Son—Mine only Son (Ps. 2, 7). In the same Psalm we have the name—Anointed. In the Old Testament He is called the Messiah—and that word being translated is Christ, which just means Anointed. When our Saviour began His ministry, He preached His first sermon from the text, "The Spirit of the Lord hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." When, therefore, we find that from all eternity our Saviour is spoken of in the counsels of God as "The Anointed," and when we see that He bears that name through all time and will bear it for ever and ever, I think we shall all grant that the anointing of Aaron as High Priest and the composition of that ointment are described at full length with special reference to Christ. There must surely be much meaning in it all, and we must try to find out some of that meaning.

The first and plainest idea which we are

taught is surely this—the idea of consecration, express setting apart for a particular object. Aaron and all his family are always so spoken of. They were to have no inheritance in Israel like the other tribes. Their work was God's work. They had, of course, private affairs like others. They had a great many duties to perform. But all they had and did was with a view to their being priests; just as we would say about a man who followed the sea that he was a sailor, although he might also engage in many other things; he might be a mathematician, a collector of natural history specimens, an astronomer, yet first and foremost he was a sailor. So we say of Aaron—"What was he?" and the answer would be, "The High Priest." So concerning our Lord. He is maker of heaven and earth, the ruler of the nations. He feeds the ravens. He is the Eternal God. Yes, He is all that, but first of all He is the Saviour of the world. He is King over all things for the Elects' sake. "What is God?" The answer is, "God is love." "He so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." His great work was anointing His Son with the Spirit. And so we come with boldness of access. Christ's work is to preach the Gospel, to ransom the captive, to heal the broken-hearted. No man would scruple to ask a mason to build, or a soldier to fight. It is their work. So the work of Christ is to care for you and me; to help us; to open the door when

we knock; to give us bread when we ask it; to come in when we bid Him; to go with us wherever we may go. And if He were to refuse to help us, He would go against the eternal decree. He would reverse the whole past history of heaven, as well as of earth.

There is the idea of public consecration. This thing was not done in a corner. He was manifest in the flesh. The light shone in the darkness. His coming was proclaimed the hour when man fell. Prophets spake of Him. Poets sang of Him. Even the enemies of God said, "I shall see Him—the Star out of Jacob." The light became brighter and brighter as men's eyes were able to bear it. The very year, and tribe, and place, and manner of His birth—all were known. Angels proclaimed it. Wise men came where the young child lay. There the star stood still. It was revealed to Simeon and Anna. And at last the Dove descended and the voice from Heaven proclaimed, "This is My beloved Son." John pointed Him out. "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." He could not be hid. At the last He was crucified before the world.

We read in a previous chapter that the priests had to lay aside their robes. They were not to appear before men as they appeared before God. But one thing they could not lay aside—the odour of the ointment. That would cling to them and follow them wherever they went. It was an odour no other might have. The people were forbidden to make aught like it. Whoever

had it must either be a priest or have been in contact with a priest. It was perceptible—it was peculiar—it was communicable. Is it not so with Christ? Even those who deny His character as Saviour grant there was something different from others. "Never man spake like this man." So with the child of God. He does not need to tell the world he is a Christian. He does not need to give day and date of his conversion. He has an unction of the Holy One— a something that goes wherever he goes —never leaves him—becomes fresher and sweeter day by day. It is not talk ; it is an atmosphere.

It was a pleasant consecration. It was the sweetest possible odour. It was a joy to be near a priest, for many perfumes were blended together. Now in our Saviour all fulness dwells; but some recognize one ingredient more quickly than another. One day cassia, another day myrrh. Yesterday His long-suffering—to-day His wisdom. But you shall find in Christ simply nothing that is not the sweetest.

You will notice the ingredients were made known (v. 34). The people knew what to look for. So in the Christian as in Christ there are virtues that can be seen—the fruits of the Spirit, which are these: love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. "Come and see." "I will show thee the Lamb's wife." There must have been solemn thoughts in the priest's mind—anxiety for the people, fear for himself, but above all, joy, the oil of gladness

flowing down his garments. The high priest had bells and pomegranates on his robes. He was adorned like a bridegroom. Would not a sad face look out of place amid all that brave attire? Can you imagine God asking a man to be happy and yet at the same time not giving him the reason why he should be happy?

"With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought. They shall enter into the King's palace."

The Greatest Thing ever done by Angels

And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness; He Who was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of Angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, received up in glory.—1 Tim. iii. 16

THE taking away of our sins by the death of our Lord and Saviour on the Cross is not only the greatest thought, it is the greatest possible thought of the Divine mind. In that death all that God is, and all that He can do, all His attributes, all His perfections, all His character, are glorified—glorified to the utmost conceivable extent, glorified as they could not possibly be in anything else that He ever did. God could not do a greater thing than give His Son, and make Him to be sin for us, Who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.

No man, therefore, could understand the Atonement till it was finished, and no angel either. The hour of God's wrath could neither be described nor imagined beforehand.

Before the Incarnation, during all the time that preceded it, ever since they had seen their fellows fall from their first estate, the angels had to face difficulties, and, if we may use the word, trials enough. Many and many a time, every hour of every day, they had to drink wine of

astonishment. Man's sin was very great. Yet they saw men forgiven, loved, and made worthy to be loved; they saw them triumph in the hour of death; they saw two escaping death and caught up into glory. They read and heard the promises of God. They saw preparations going on in Heaven, mansions even then being made ready for a great multitude that no man could number. Above all they saw the joy there was in the face of God as the fulness of the time drew near. Then, after thousands of years had passed away, they were sent with the glad tidings, "To you is born this day a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."

Could they ever have anticipated that their King and Lord was to be cradled in a manger, or born a helpless babe, and wrapped in swaddling clothes? Must they not, all through His childhood and boyhood and youth and early manhood, have wondered what this humiliation meant? At His baptism He was openly acknowledged to be the Son of God; but that baptism was followed by new trials and new kinds of trials. They saw Him driven into the wilderness, an hungred, and they dared not help Him until God gave them leave. The marvel grew deeper every day. They saw Him weary and refused a drink of water. They saw Him going about doing good, and yet despised, rejected, slandered. Then, like the disciples, they saw the strange kindling of His countenance, His eager step, as He set His face steadfastly towards Jerusalem. They heard Him say He was to be

crucified, and after that to rise the third day. At last, the night before He suffered, they saw Him betrayed; and one angel, at least, was present in Gethsemane. "The angel that strengthened my Lord in the Garden" was Rabbi Duncan's favourite; and to some, no doubt, that work of ministry seems by far the greatest, highest task an angel ever did.

But let us see what happened after. Our Lord came to the place called Golgotha, and they saw, as from His own words they were prepared to see, the nails driven through His hands and His feet. But could they ever have imagined all that followed? They had seen good men spat upon and tortured, they had seen them stoned and sawn asunder; but they had *never* seen a man forsaken of God. They had seen men sorely tried; but as their days, so was their strength. Underneath them in the darkest hours were the everlasting arms. But this Man, Who had done nothing amiss, the Lamb without blemish and without spot, the Beloved Son in whom God was well pleased—they saw Him, *Him*, forsaken, and they heard Him cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" To stand and witness *that* was the sorest test of faith and obedience that either man or angel ever had to face. We know how the disciples fled even before that hour had come. When Christ's feet had barely touched the edge of that Jordan, Peter, the Rock, denied both Him and God, and cursed and swore. And many of us can enter into Peter's feelings. It is an awful

moment when any man or woman, young or old, thinks that God has acted unworthily of Himself. That moment comes to all, soon or late. Happy, thrice happy he—especially if that hour come in youth—who says, when things are at their worst, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

This was the difficulty in which the angels were. They knew, from thousands of years' experience, that God was holy and just in all His ways, that He could do nothing that was wrong. They knew that no man ever cried to Him and was not heard. Yet here was Christ, the very Son of God, treated as no man ever was. And they heard His infinitely bitter cry. Surely that was a trial, a trial to their faith such as we cannot put in words. Was there strife between God and His Well-beloved? Had the Father ceased to love the Son? And if strife there was, how could they continue neutral? Whose side in the battle could they take, and would they take, when Both were holy?

How many angels saw the Crucifixion we do not know. Doubtless that day they were doing God's pleasure in all parts of His dominions. But none, we think, could be utter strangers to what had come to pass in Jerusalem. And that they stood that trial of their faith and love is, next to the death of our Lord itself, the very highest tribute ever paid to the goodness and holiness of God. Yes, it must have been an awful moment. And it was in that darkest hour that ever was that the angels did the greatest thing they ever did—*they did nothing:* they

stood still, and waited. And they saw the salvation of God. The moment of Christ's death must have been to them tremendous beyond words. But the difficulty was over with the moment that brought it. The world still stood. The sun shone out again. The course of Nature went on as before, and every whistling bird and each green leaf, and every drop of water in the universe, and every living man, was a token that hell and Satan had been vanquished, and the throne of God established for ever and ever. And because in that hour of trial the angels refrained from doing aught, and trusted God when for the moment He seemed to be false to His own character, and seemed to break every oath He had ever made—because of this we are bound to admire and love these holy ones and to bless God for making them, and making them our ministers.

The Counsel of Ahithophel

And the counsel of Ahithophel, which he counselled in those days, was as if a man had enquired at the oracle of God: so was all the counsel of Ahithophel both with David and with Absalom.—2 Sam. xvi. 23.

To Solomon, it is said in 1 Kings iv. 29-31, "God gave wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore. And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men; than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol." This is high praise, indeed. But to say that the counsel or advice that Ahithophel gave was as good as if one enquired at the "oracle" or "word" of God is higher still, and indeed is the highest possible.

Is there anything told us of him in the Bible that justifies this reputation?—anything that forced one to say to him, as the Queen of Sheba said to Solomon, "It was a true report that I heard of thy acts and of thy wisdom"? Only two specimens of his counsel are given. Both relate to Absalom in connection with his rebellion against his father, and anything more sinful, more shameful, more loathsome, more unlike the "word" of God and the fundamental laws

of nature, it is impossible to imagine. To look for anything in the least like God in these most ungodly counsels seems not only hopeless, but wrong. And yet, as from the wreck of a spoilt and broken column we may calculate something of its lost proportions and its style, so in this bad man we may see some traces of the divine image he had lost.

What it was that made Ahithophel turn against his old friend and master, David, we do not fully know. Enough to say, Ahithophel was Bath-sheba's grandfather. His rebellion was part of that awful tragedy—"the matter of Uriah the Hittite."

The advice he gave Absalom was, as we have said, bad, unspeakably bad, as bad as it could be. And yet, putting aside for the moment all questions of morality, there were two points in it which show the touch of a master, two points which we should all do well to imitate.

1.—Decision of mind. "If you mean to be king," he says to Absalom, "there must be no halting between two opinions, no hesitation, no sitting on the fence, no yielding to scruples, or conscience, or anything else." It is the same advice as that which Shakespeare makes Lady Macbeth give to her husband :

> "Would'st thou have that
> Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,
> And live a coward in thine own esteem,
> Letting 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would,'
> Like the poor cat i' the adage?"

It is the same advice as that which Queen Elizabeth gave to Sir Walter Raleigh when he wrote these words on a pane of glass in her presence :

"Fain would I climb but that I fear to fall" ;

to which her answer was :

"If thy heart fail thee, why then climb at all ?"

All history shows that the man who makes success his god must let no obstacles whatever stand in his way.

"He either fears his fate too much,
Or his deserts are small,
That dares not put it to the touch
To gain or lose it all."

Readers of recent French history know that, to quote from Mr. Spender in his *Comments of Bagshot*, the man who makes up his own mind makes up other people's minds. The late Emperor Napoleon reached the throne because he was willing to wade through perjury and blood. Boulanger, and some others, failed, because they stood hesitating on the brink. We see it in our own recent history. Men have a certain respect, even though they disagree with him, for "the whole hogger." The "Mr. Facing-both-ways" they will not stand. And from Ahithophel, and the men of this world who are like him, the children of light may learn this lesson—Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.

There must be no putting off to a convenient season which, as one has said, "we hope will never come." We must in certain things "cast the die," "cross the Rubicon," and "burn our boats." Neither God nor man can put up with those that are neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm.

2.—Action. Immediate action must follow decision. There must be no "sooner or later"; instantly is the word, or, as Kipling says is the way in the Navy, quicker than instantly. There is a moment in most battles, say military men, when both armies are ready to flee, and the issue depends on who flees first. And once an advantage is gained, the advantage must be pushed to the uttermost. "The secret of war," said the First Napoleon once, "is to march twelve leagues, fight a battle, and march twelve more in pursuit." Isn't that just what Ahithophel said? "Let me now choose out 12,000 men, and I will arise and pursue after David this night; and I will come upon him while he is weary and weak-handed, and will make him afraid; and all the people that are with him shall flee; and I will smite the king only." In his *History of the Peninsular War*, Napier affirms that that was one chief difference between the two great opposing commanders. "The battle of Wellington was the stroke of a battering ram; down went the wall in ruins. The battle of Napoleon was the swell and rush of a mighty wave, before which the barrier yielded, and the roaring flood poured onwards, covering all." And again, "Welling-

ton conquered only the ground on which he stood." That, too, is Lord Wolseley's advice in his *Soldier's Pocket Book:* When the enemy runs, "keep him on the run."

"That thou doest, do quickly." That is good advice if we are doing well. "*Hoc age*," that is, This do, Go at it, says Dr. Johnson, in a letter to one of the Thrales, "is the great rule whether you are serious or merry, whether you are slating the expenses of your family, learning science or duty from a folio, or floating on the Thames in a fancied dress." And if we are doing ill, walking on the road that leads to destruction, it may do a man good sometimes to do it quickly. *Respice finem*, says the old proverb. Have a regard to the end. Think where you are going. Make sure what station your train stops at when you step into it. For we are apt to drift, to go on insensibly, to forget how hideous a thing sin is by falling into it by slow degrees. We are like people who do not see how old they are getting, because they see themselves in the looking-glass many times a day, and the rate of change is too slow to be perceptible. But the friends who haven't seen us for a year or two are startled at the difference.

There are two other lessons that we may learn from this subject. Ahithophel, like many a politician, may be as wise as any man was ever made, but an Absalom may determine the issue. "Twenty wise men," says one who has played no little part in the making and unmaking of recent Governments, "may easily add up into

one fool." And further, clever as the Hushais and Ahithophels and Absaloms may be, looking not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seeking the Lord, yet, as Isaiah says (chapter xxxi, 2), "He also is wise."

3.—Wisdom without grace is folly. In another sense than that in which the poet Dryden said it in his satire, *Absalom and Ahithophel*, it is only too true sometimes that

> "Great wits are sure to madness near allied,
> And thin partitions do their bounds divide."

When Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his ass, and arose, and gat him home to his house, to his city, and put his household in order, and hanged himself. Every wise boy that has ever played in a game, every wise general that has ever fought a battle, knows that neither the game nor the battle is lost till the other side has won it. A hundred things may turn up unexpectedly and change the balance in a moment.

But Ahithophel, whose name means "my brother is folly," did violence not only to his own reputation for wisdom, but to the character of God for mercy. The man who, in his full senses, takes his own life, denies the truth and mercy and love of God. Judas went far astray in betraying his Master with a kiss, but that sin, great as it was, was as nothing compared with his sin in despairing of pardon and salvation. If there was one thing our Lord had tried to teach him, it was this, that God is ready to forgive,

that with Him is plenteous redemption. When Judas gave way to despair, he in effect gave the lie to all that Christ had come into the world to say and do. If he had returned to his Master, however late, and craved forgiveness, Christ would have welcomed him with open arms.

The Cursed Gibeonites

Now therefore ye Gibeonites are cursed.—Joshua ix. 23

THESE are Joshua's words—not God's. The treatment of the Canaanites by the Israelites when they entered the Promised Land has been a stumbling-block to many. But it should be remembered that the Canaanites were to be put to death, not because they were idolaters; still less because they had to be got rid of in some way in order that there might be room for the Jews; but because they were a people whom God had striven with in vain for four hundred years, who were now ripe for destruction. Their sins were such as, happily, there are no words for in the English language. Their religion was a shameful system of debauchery and murder. If God had told us the things they really did, the Bible would have been a book unfit for reading. And the women were worse than the men.

The God of the Old Testament, as men sometimes call Him, was as holy and as loving, as incapable of doing a wrong thing or a cruel thing, as the God of the New Testament. It must grieve His Son unspeakably every day to hear men speak as if His Father had to be persuaded, as it were, against His will to be kind to men. God's nature was not altered 1900 years ago by the birth and life and death

of Jesus Christ. It was not then that He began to love the world. He loved it—that is, God the Father loved it—from all Eternity, and so loved it that He gave His only begotten Son to die for us. And that Son is the express image of the Father. "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." Yet this love of God the Father is the very last thing that men see or are willing to believe.

The treatment of the Gibeonites by God is a story of God's tenderness to sinners that is not surpassed even in the New Testament.

If one were asked how a sinner ought to come to God, one would say in the words of the Shorter Catechism, that "Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the Mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of and endeavour after new obedience." That is to say, he must come frankly, honestly, keeping back nothing, seeking mercy only for mercy's sake:

> "Nothing in my hands I bring,
> Simply to Thy Cross I cling."

Tried by that standard, I am afraid we should have said there was absolutely no hope for the Gibeonites.

They came to Joshua at the last possible moment—when they could do no better—merely to save their lives; they came, not as suppliants, but as "ambassadors," and ambassadors, as

Walpole said, are the only men in the world who have a right to be proud; that is, they came as equals, as persons who have an equivalent to offer; and they came with lies in their mouths, lies in their hands, lies on their very feet. And "liars" is the one designation that sums up all who are shut out from God's presence at the Day of Judgment. "For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie." (Rev. xxii, 15.) No; one fails to see in the Gibeonites a single mark of the repentant sinner which the most tender-hearted New Testament saint could possibly have accepted.

Yet God received them! Not because they outwitted Him, for that they did not, though they outwitted Joshua; but because He saw, amid all ignorance and sin, what He could not have trusted the Israelites to discover—the faith that was but as a grain of mustard seed.

"Now therefore ye are cursed, and there shall none of you be freed from being bondmen, and hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God." What a contrast! What a contradiction between the beginning and the ending of that verse! It is just as if Joshua had written the opening words, and God had taken the pen out of his hand and written the closing ones. "Ye are cursed; therefore ye shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever!" "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts, saith the Lord."

"Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house." That was the curse that fell on the Gibeonites—to be attached for ever "to the congregation and to the altar of the Lord, in the place which He should choose." To be hewers of wood and drawers of water was hard work, but it was honourable. There was no stranger, no little child, but would find himself gazing, on his first visit to the Tabernacle of God, at the strange foreign-looking men who were serving in the court. They say that when Sir Colin Campbell, after the relief of Lucknow, gave a Victoria Cross to a regiment, to be bestowed on the man whom they thought most worthy of it, the men unanimously chose the "bhistie," or water-carrier, who had faithfully attended them on their march and in the thickest of the fight. So, I have no doubt, the Gibeonites, as being the first men whom they would most readily put questions to, would do more to make men and women feel at home at the courts of God's house than the priests and Levites themselves would.

"Ye are cursed!"—"Come, ye blessed!" And right well did God keep His word to them, as the subsequent story shows. It was for them He made the sun stand still upon Gibeon, and the moon in the valley of Ajalon. It was amongst them He afterwards pitched His tent; and in still later days, when priests and Levites failed, He made them take their places.

The Gibeonites were like ourselves. No man has ever come to God as he ought to have come. There is sin even in our clinging to the Cross.

The Cursed Gibeonites

I was once sent for to see a man who was ill, and in great trouble of mind. He had made a covenant with God when he was a boy, he told me, writing it on his knees, with tears, on the morning of his first Communion. "But," he said, "that covenant itself is enough to condemn me. For after I wrote it, and signed it, I mentioned my age, thinking that after I was dead, if it should come into the hands of people, they might see how young I was when I had written it, and they would say, 'How wonderfully good that boy must have been!'" That sin, that pride, he feared, had vitiated all his transacting with God. What could I do but tell him to bring that sin, like all others he had committed, to the Lamb of God, Whose blood cleanseth from all sin?

Man's Judgment and God's Judgment

But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment.—1 Cor. iv. 3.

When any of us is wronged, or thinks he is wronged, the first thing he naturally thinks of doing is to take revenge, to strike back, to give tit for tat, an eye at least for an eye, and not less than one tooth for a tooth, and more if possible. And as there are always many who are eager for a fight between others, there is no lack of advisers to remind us of our rights, and of what they would fondly have us call our duties. They reinforce our passion and add a fuel that costs them nothing to our fire. Have you no spirit? no spunk? Are you going to take it lying down? Are you willing to let anybody and everybody trample on you? Where is your Highland blood? your British pluck? Have you forgotten your country's emblem, the Scottish thistle, and its magnificent and defiant, though perhaps unfortunately slightly unscriptural motto, *Nemo me impune lacessit*—the man that tramples on me will pay for it? If *I* were *you*—and there is much virtue in an "if" like that—I would spend my last penny and assert my rights and prove myself a *man*. His only regret is that unfortunately he is unable to share the expense—he wishes he had been rich and he would have

lifted his last penny—but he will do what he can, that is to say, he will enjoy watching the fight, and, of course, will be no sufferer if you win—it is only fair that your backers should share the spoils; and if you lose, he will, provided he has not meanwhile disappeared, sympathize with you and tell you that might invariably triumphs over right; or perhaps he will be your critic and show you at what point of the battle you made a fatal mistake—as he only too clearly foresaw. But meantime you can issue your challenge and indulge in those preliminary prancings that are common among savages—most warfare has a savage element, indeed it is not easy to keep it out—the preliminary prancings in which, as in a boy's preliminary dives on his way to the bathing-place, courage has been sometimes known wholly to evaporate.

The first and most natural impulse when one is insulted, is to the policy of revenge. But there are other and no doubt wiser counsellors who bid us never mind. What does it matter? they say. Don't heed him. The man that has wronged you is not worth your powder and shot. Say nothing. Let him alone. Take no notice. Treat him, as you can well afford to do, with the contempt he deserves.

And at first sight that seems to be the policy recommended in this verse by Paul: "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment." Paul here seems to say that he does not care for *any*

man's hostile judgment, no, nor for *all* men's hostile judgment. Here is no "Athanasius contra mundum"—here is not one man against the world, with his back against the wall—here rather is one who just "jouks" and lets the world go by. "A very small thing to be judged of any man's judgment." There is a splendid daring, a magnificent recklessness, a heroic indifference to the universe, that for a moment captivates one's attention, and almost takes one's breath away. But the very magnificence of it somehow makes one suspicious. Does Paul really mean to say what the words apparently undoubtedly imply—that what any one man thinks of him, or what all men put together think of him, is a *very little thing*?

The words of the text seem to mean that we do well to treat opponents with contempt. And the world would give many reasons for that.

First of all, the man, your enemy, your critic, your hostile judge, is a fool; a fool, if not by nature, at least by dint of labour and consummate achievement. If he wasn't born a fool, he has made himself one. As such you are justified in treating him, and there are many ways of doing that.

The best way—that is, the most cutting and effective way, the most annihilating way—is absolute silence—silent contempt, we call it. But that needs rare self-control. It means that one must not betray by word or sign any consciousness even of the existence of your victim.

There's no pomp or pageantry in that kind of war. There is no field of battle, no drawing out the hosts, no sound of great guns or artillery. It is like shooting with an air-gun from behind a fence, or letting fly an arrow in the dusk. It is like killing by a blow that leaves no mark; the victim bleeds internally. And there is no song of victory, no conqueror's gazette or bulletin, for there never had been, apparently, a state of war. The winner in that fight must wait—it may be for years—till some other discovers the dead body in the bush, and then the world finds out the masterly manœuvre and applauds the conqueror's skill and the conqueror's reticence.

But human nature likes to draw blood and to see blood; it loves to see a victim publicly compelled to own defeat. And in most cases therefore when we say we mean to treat a man or thing with the silent contempt he or it deserves, we break the silence by just proclaiming it. Take two instances of this from the life of Sir Robert Peel, given in the autobiography of the late Duke of Argyll. The first was uttered in reply to an attack made on him by Disraeli. "Sir," said Peel, addressing the Speaker, "I will not waste the time of the House in making any reply to the venomous attacks of the hon. member." "Here the word 'venomous,'" says the Duke, "was pronounced with emphasis, and with a peculiar curling of the lips, which was very expressive of intense contempt."

"Another time," says the Duke, "he treated

Disraeli with a lofty and a due disdain." "The hon. gentleman," said Peel, "frequently and feelingly complains that I won't condescend to bandy personalities with him. . . . Every man has a right to determine for himself with whom he will descend into the arena of personal contest."

It is more usual, however, to express and to glory in expressing the contempt we feel. A member of Parliament once said of something or other that it did not appeal to his mind. "Sir," said Disraeli, "the hon. member says the argument does not appeal to what he is pleased to term his mind."

Take an example from his great rival, one who in another way was a master of words. A member of Parliament laughed one day offensively or untimeously when Mr. Gladstone was speaking; whereupon he turned towards his interrupter and said, "Sir, I would advise the hon. member to endeavour to punctuate his laughter with an idea." That's neat—just like the other—but is it like Paul ?

Take another example. It was at a great meeting in Edinburgh, and a citizen, whom no one had ever treated wholly as a fool before, put a question which Mr. Gladstone did not wish to answer. That great orator might have said so, but turning to the aged man, he said, tapping his own forehead, "I am responsible for what God has put in *here*, but not for what He has put in *there*." That was not neat, and I imagine most even of the great audience whom it

convulsed felt it to be brutal—there was more than a touch of brutality in it.

Was it fair of Queen Elizabeth, speaking of Philip of Spain, to say, "I shall never be afraid of a man who took ten years to learn his alphabet"? Yet can we distinguish language like that from Paul's word: "With me it is a very little thing to be judged of you or of man's judgment"?

That is the first thing we say—the man is a fool; he's not worth heeding; nobody pays any attention to what he says; he has contradicted himself a score of times already; you are not the first he has attacked. Remember the motto engraven on the old house as you go up to Stirling Castle: "They say—what say they?—let them say!"

But then, if we are worldly wise, we add, in the second place: Suppose he could hurt you; suppose it does harm you, very few will ever hear of it. The world is a big world, and your world is a very little one. You think your character is smirched, blasted, ruined, and that all the world is talking of you. They never heard of it in Canada, and that is only one of many English-speaking continents. There are many lands in Europe where your name was never heard—or if you can only find refuge in an English-speaking country, there's Canada, and the United States, and Australia; they are not speaking or thinking about you there. Why go so far away? There's England: get a big map and look at the countless towns and

villages that take no interest either in your honour or dishonour. Nay, take our own Scotland—take even Greenock—take the next street—the chances are the first 20, 50, 100 people you meet never saw you before, never heard of you, will not even notice you as you go by. They have other things to talk of than your concerns.

But even if they had not, and did talk about you, they will all have forgotten you by to-morrow morning. Do you not see that every day? That letter in the papers that was so full of pungent wit, why, you can't remember it—even if you read it—when the reply, equally witty, appears two days after.

But let the worst come to the worst, your affairs will only be a nine days' wonder at the most. We talk of the transitoriness of fame.

"Well," says the poet,

> "Well, as to fame, who strides the earth
> With that long horn she loves to blow,
> I know a little of her worth,
> And I will tell you what I know.
>
> This London once was middle sea,
> These hills were plains within the past;
> They will be plains again, and we
> Poor creatures, babble—we shall last."

And what is true of good report is little less true of ill report.

These are the two things that at first seem to be in our text. Men are fools, and they can't harm us even when they try; that is what

people mean when they say, Never mind him! What harm does it do you? Just say like Paul: I don't care in the least what people think or say of me; to *me* it is a very small thing to be judged of man's judgment.

And yet we feel instinctively that that is not what Paul says, and it is not what Paul felt; indeed it is the very opposite of what he felt. To him it was a great thing, the second greatest thing on earth, to be judged of men.

To say most men are fools, not worth heeding, is a serious thing for one to say who is himself a man, and a man with a history he remembers. It is one of those boomerangs that fly through the air and come back, after however tortuous a course, to the feet of the man who threw them. It is one of those sayings that come home to roost.

But think of the tremendous issues involved in such a judgment—think of the tremendous indictment it brings against God. The man whose judgment I despise is not only *my* fellow man, but he was made by God, and however far he has fallen, God cares for him, God cares for his opinion, God cares for his judgment, and cares so much for that judgment that He submits the most momentous of all questions to it—submits His own claims, submits His Son's claims, to it. What think ye of Christ? Whose Son is He? Who do ye say the Son of Man is? But that one question involves a thousand more every day we live, and these thousand more our intellects, our minds, our intelligences, *must* answer.

Think of the awful questions raised by the subject of human responsibility. Not only must men—not picked men, or leaders of men, or men here and there, but all men, the man you meet in the streets, the men and women that are sitting beside you now in these pews—I say not only must they answer the most tremendous questions that the Infinite Mind of God Himself can put, not only must they answer them in a few short years at most, years shortened still more by the subtractions of infancy and sleep and sickness and old age, and all the distractions of our various toils in life—but on these questions depends our everlasting well-being. That man of whom, we say, it is a very little thing to be judged, is yet to be tried for his opinion, and therefore he must be capable of forming an opinion on matters whose issues are only two, eternal life and eternal death. You and I may pass him by and say he is not worth heeding, but that man's cry reaches the ear of the Lord of Sabaoth, and turns God's eyes, and hastens God's steps, and makes God's heart beat quick, 10,000 times a day.

And there will come another hour, a long, long hour or day—how long we cannot tell—when that man, fool or no fool, will stand up before all men, and all angels, and God shall be face to face with him, and after that day is passed the ages of endless ages that we call eternity will never be the same again either for him or for God.

No knight of Arthur's ever dealt in scorn,

and Paul was as true and courteous a knight to friend or foe as ever put spear in rest. You —some of you at least—heard the famous question: Do the higher order of cherubim ever sneer? *That*, we may be sure, they never do, for they are made of one piece wth the mercy-seat of God. Can we think of Paul sneering? No man that ever lived had such high regard for the sanctity of the human mind and the greatness of human powers. To one of his intelligence there was nothing small in that mind that in every man is the candle of the Lord. Nor can we for a moment think that Paul would have said: No man can harm me whatever his thought of me may be. Even were that so, it should be enough to vex us that he harms himself. But it does harm us. There is a certain immortality, a certain infinite greatness, in every human act.

> "It hurts us if a baby hides its face,
> Or child strikes at us puuily, calls names,
> Or makes a mouth."

The human heart cries out for respect, for reverence, for love. We are too conscious of our destiny to do aught else.

I once asked a man how he enjoyed a visit to Ceylon he had been paying. "Very much, of course," he said. "And," he added, "the thing I remember best about it always vexes me." And then he told me what it was. He had hired a catamaran, one of the surf-boats, from a native at, I think, Point de Galle. He wished

just to be able to say he had been in one. The native imagined he had hired it for a cruise, and when after a few moments he left the boat, there was a dispute about the money that was due. The man thought, judging by every standard he could apply, that he had acted handsomely; the native said he was cheating him, and after much disputing fired this parting shot in English : " You no gentleman." " I would like," said the man who told me this, " to meet that native again and argue it out with him." " No gentleman " was an imputation under which he could not rest; it grieved him that a man—a foreigner, a poor Cingalese boatman, who was never to see him again, but still a man, should wittingly or unwittingly misjudge him. Have we not all felt the same ? Who does not wince at some judgment hastily made, thoughtlessly uttered—it may be by a child—a score of years ago ?

You see children playing at school, getting palmies, and smiling as they get them. But let a teacher only say, " *Hold out your hand*," and give one single palmy not half so hard, the tears are there before the blow has fallen.

To the Apostle Paul, to live was Christ; to preach Christ was more than life to him. To get men to believe in Christ—it was for that he was a chosen vessel. He stood in Christ's stead, as every preacher stands; but he stood more in Christ's stead than any man that ever lived. He was the chiefest of the Apostles, the man who had seen God's glory and com-

prehended God's secret as no man ever had. Greater than Moses, he had been, not simply alone with God upon the Mount, but caught up into Paradise, and had seen such things as no tongue or pen could utter or express. He carried in his hands as no man ever did the ark of God, the oracles of God, the honour of God, and in some ways the world's destiny. To win men's personal regard for himself was almost the same as winning them for Christ—it was the first step to it. And was that a very little thing? Was it not rather the very greatest thing?

And yet why does Paul after all call it a very little thing? Does not the explanation lie in this—it was a big thing in itself, absolutely big, absolutely infinite one may almost say, and yet, compared with being judged by God, it was a little thing—relatively, as we say, a very little thing. The sea out there behind us is a big thing compared with the ponds upon the heights behind you, and these ponds again are big compared with the gush a child builds with clay and clods upon the street, and that again looks big to the child—forty years after this even it will boast and brag of them—I say it's big beside a drop of water, and that drop may seem a monstrous thing to the animalcule that takes all its life to search within one corner of that drop and finds there ample space for careering in. But what is that drop, that gush, that pond, that harbour, to that great and spacious sea, on which one may journey weeks on end without sighting a single sail,

that sea whose depths no plummet ever sounded, that sea that tosses on a single billow the mightiest ship that man can make as though it were a cockle-shell? And what is this great globe itself to its fellows in our solar system? And what is that great sun itself and all its attendants with their ever-revolving satellites to those vast worlds that amaze our vision—still more to those uncounted orbs whose wanderings are within God's sight and in God's book alone?

Even so, it is not man's littleness but God's immensity, His infinite immensity, that here strikes upon Paul's imagination. A kind word, a hearty tribute, a well-timed compliment, a smile of satisfaction, a gesture of delight, a loving glance, may turn night into day, and chase away despair and banish fear and kindle hope and be as life from the dead to one, and will be surely remembered even in eternity. And on the other hand, a slander, a cruel accusation, a jibe, a sneer, a taunt, a gesture of contempt, an artful silence, may cause the blood to fly to my cheeks, may make me quit the company I sought, may force me to leave my customary road and choose a by-path for my homeward way; the thought of any one of these things may rouse my anger every time it comes into my memory; nay, when 20, 30, 40, 60 years have gone, and the man who uttered it has been for half a century with God, the remembrance of one word, one tone, may vex me and may make me wince. And if all that comes through the half-formed, misinformed judgment of a man,

how great a thing, and how fearful a thing it must be to fall into the hands of the living God. If even the very Son of God after ten million times ten million years of preparation, and of fellowship, and joy, surpassing human thought, trembled to bear the wrath of God for less than two rounds of the clock, though there was another eternity of countless ages of still greater joy to follow, how shall you, how shall I, face that God, unless by taking Christ as our Saviour and Intercessor we make sure of a joyful welcome and a complete acquittal in that day?

Doth God Care for Oxen?

Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together.—Deut. xxii. 10.

WHATEVER our feeling towards the House of God this afternoon may be, whatever our reason for being here, longing to see our Father's face, or detained before the Lord against our will; whatever our attitude towards the preacher, friendly or hostile, indifferent or critical; whatever our relationship to Christ, His lovers or His haters—and we number all these amongst us—no matter what we be, I am sure we cannot help being struck with the seeming incongruity between that matchless Psalm (cxviii. 22-29) we have sung and the text I am now asking you to consider for a little. From the very horns of the altar to the pole of the plough, from the awful burden of the Cross to the bullock's yoke, from the road to Gethsemane to a common field, from eternity to time, and from the most solemn hour there had ever yet been in eternity to the simplest and most oft-repeated of a labourer's daily tasks—how sudden, how almost fearful a come-down, how worse than ludicrous the contrast—might we not almost say, how blasphemous the anti-climax! And yet these words were not only uttered and written by God Himself, before whom all things are ever present,

and ever present in their true relation, but they were uttered by Him, may I not say, within less than a stonecast from the Cross, for twelve verses back we find Him saying: Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree. And He was still looking at the Cross and at Him Who was to hang upon it in the fulness of the time when He spoke these words about the ox and the ass.

The first thing I wish you to learn from the text is the great fact that God *does* take care for oxen. And that itself should help any who are here this afternoon who may be of little faith and of doubtful mind, whose hearts may be failing them for fear. There are many things, one would think, that might cheer a timid voyager when the wind is high and the sea is rough. Was not his ship built and engined on the Clyde by one of the best of the best builders in the world? So big that it could carry in one of its holds and upon its deck at once the ships in which Columbus and Drake and Frobisher and Sir Richard Grenville crossed unknown and hostile seas and won renown that shall outlast the sea and time itself? Has not the vessel obtained a good report through the storms and seas of six winters already, and this is but an autumn gale? Is not the captain the best beloved and most trusted of all the company's commanding officers? Is not his face rich with the lines that come with experience and courage and high daring, and bronzed with the colour that comes to those whose mission it is to gaze into the spindrift and the stormy

wind? Any one of these things might well assure "him of the chicken-heart," but more than by the record either of the stout ship and its still stouter officers and crew such a man is comforted when he sees the common routine work of the vessel go on uninterruptedly. Surely if the ship were going down that sailor would not be busy with his holystone, nor would that other be polishing the brasses, not that third man making rope quoits for the amusement of the coming afternoon.

Even so, when you and I come here, wondering if there is still hope for us. Can I dare to cast my care on God? My heart revives and tears of joy come to my eyes when I hear Christ say: Consider the lilies, consider the ravens. Ye are worth many sparrows. Does God take care for you? Yes, He thinks about them. He made them. The cattle on a thousand hills—"even they are all Mine own." And God gave them, good and perfect gifts, to the sons of men. The ox lives for us and dies for us. To oxen was the guidance of the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord of Hosts entrusted, its name—"thou, thine ox and thine ass"—was written by God's own hand not only in the first, but in the second table of the law. When God by the mouth of Ezekiel (i, 10) would describe the varied powers and characteristics of the Cherubim, does He not say they had four faces each, the face of a man, the face of a lion, the face of an eagle, and the face of an ox? And as for the ass, whose name with us is the

symbol of stupidity and stubbornness and waywardness, was it not it that alone of all creatures was endowed for one great moment with the lofty attributes of reason and of speech, a faculty of "looking before and after," that put to shame the second wisest man of his time in all the world? And was it not a young ass and its mother that contributed to the joy and honour of the very King of Glory in one of the most triumphant hours of His life? He had watched it from its birth, had guided all its steps till it stood tied at that door without in a place where two ways met—waiting, ready, for the Lord had need of him. Did not the ass come nearest to Him in one sense of all created things that day?

Thou shalt not plough with an ox and an ass together. Not that God would grudge companionship to either one or the other. For if there is one thing that is alien to the very nature of God it is *loneliness*. There are three Persons in the Godhead. Their fellowship is incomparably sweet and beautiful and close, and these Three are One. And such joy had God in this fulness of love that that love overflowed. And He said, Let us make man, for He wished many sons and daughters. And He made man in His own image and said, It is not good for him to be alone. And as He made man, male and female, so He made all His creatures. And none of them is happy—fully happy—if it be alone. They drew together, even the ox and the ass, if you put them in the same

field. And when the oxen are ploughing they plough all the better because the asses are feeding beside them, and the asses feed with more pleasure because the oxen are working near at hand. They have a fellowship we cannot fully enter into, sharing one another's thoughts, understanding one another's trials and dangers and sorrows; even a lion and an ass, as we know from the Book of Kings, can have that full respect that comes from taking part together in a mysterious tragedy. Yes, God takes care of oxen, and just because there are times when they are happy together, so God says there are times when they must be kept apart. Thou shalt not plough with an ox and an ass together : and we can easily understand the reason. It is not every two *horses* that can plough together, or run in double harness. A well-matched pair, well-matched in all respects, is hard to find. Their height, their strength, their step, and especially their willingness, their spirit, must all agree. But the ox has one way of pulling and the ass another. Their pace is different, one quick and lively, one solemn and slow, the one plodding, the other eager. And their strength is as different as their pace. A fair division of labour is simply impossible. Even if they *would*, they *could* not do it. One would only hinder and keep back the other, or tire it beyond its strength. Their food, their hours of labour, their powers of endurance are not the same. And their modes of thought are not the same. Each has a world, a distinct

world of its own, with joys and trials and hopes and fears and ambitions and memories the other cannot enter into. It is true they have not the complicated and infinitely solemn tasks *we* have, but just because their time is short and only one world is theirs, and it is we by our sin who have brought sorrow into their lives, let us do all we can to help them to a full and noble fulfilment of their daily task and destiny.

"But is it for the oxen that God careth? or saith He it altogether for our sake? Yea," says Paul, "for our sake it was written."

The words come to us therefore in the second place as a solemn warning. If we are God's people we are God's husbandry, we are God's tilled land. We have a work and a big, long, great day's work to do for Him.

You know what happens when the leading horses in a four-in-hand turn in their traces, and come face to face with the comrades that were behind them. You can guess what would happen, if such a thing were possible, if one horse in the plough looked forward and one looked backward.

It is bad enough if in an ordinary journey, even for a little distance, two persons do not keep step; and therefore that is the very first thing soldiers must do, and it is what they must always do—they must keep step—keep rank. That is one of the differences between a trained band and a crowd. An equal step means equal distances in equal times with equal swing, or if that cannot be, as when a man and his little

girl walk hand in hand, there must be a certain rhythmic proportion in their step. And however fond two people may be of each other's company, however eager to go the same road and the same distance, in the same time, with mutual love and helpfulness, it takes pains and effort to keep step. Some there are that can keep the same unvarying pace through a long and weary day, but most men walk fitfully, now briskly, now leisurely, now with a stride, and now with a shortened step. So two who walk together must be agreed not only as to where they wish to go, they must agree to be considerate, the stronger yielding to the weaker, yet helping and encouraging him, the weaker striving to do better ; and if they are pulling a load, each pulling honestly and fairly. One of the most capable of Polar travellers — Captain Scott of the *Discovery*—has described very minutely and graphically the characteristics of the dogs that were used for hauling the sledges in his great expedition in Antarctic regions. There was the leader of the pack, Nigger by name, whom it was a delight to watch at his work : he seemed to know the meaning of every move. Ever ready to start the moment the word was given, he would brace his powerful chest to the harness. At the evening halt after a long day he would drop straight in his tracks and remain perfectly still with his great head resting on his paws; other dogs might clamour for food, but Nigger knew perfectly well that the tent had to be put up first.

Then there was Lewis, a very powerful but not a consistent puller. There was Grannie, old and toothless, who yet, like one or two others, pulled to the last gasp, and died game in the traces.

And to mention only one other, there was Jim, a sleek, lazy, greedy villain, up to all the tricks of the trade; he could pull splendidly when he chose, but generally preferred to *pretend* to pull, and at this he was extraordinarily cunning. During the march his eye never left the man with the whip, on whose approach Jim could be seen panting and labouring as though he felt sure that everything depended on his efforts; but a moment or two later, when the danger had passed, the watchful eye would detect Master Jim with a trace that had a very palpable sag in it.

Sledge work, says the same writer, is a sure test of character. When you are harnessed with a man it brings out all that's base and unworthy, or all that is good and generous. And what is life but bearing a yoke, carrying a burden, drawing often an ever-lengthening chain? Think of the long road before you, often through mist and darkness and storm; think of life's inevitable trials, the trials that can be foreseen; remember the worse ones that cannot be foreseen. Ask God, I beseech you, all you who are young, ask God to choose your playmates, your chums, your friends, your comrades at school and at play, and in business, and in hours of recreation. Above all, every young man and

every young woman here, every unmarried lonely one, beg of God if He so will as to give you a partner in life, beg of Him to give you the one that He approves of. Tell Him you cannot trust your own judgment, you are not quick to discern either good or evil; wrestle with Him till He must choose out for you the lot of your inheritance.

What a fearful thing it must be for husband and wife to be at cross purposes in everything—to have one looking onward, upward, heavenward, and the other making steps that lead to hell. I spoke to a man some time ago in the Infirmary. He had no minister, went to no church. After a little he told me why. "You see," he said, "my wife and me's different—we pull opposite ways. I'm a Protestant and she's a Catholic. So I go no place." Oh, what a fearful position to be in—to wish to pray and have no one to pray with; to have to leave the partner of your name and life, the mother of your children, outside whenever you draw near to God; to be unable to share the greatest joys, the only true joys, the joys that outlast the grave, with one to whom you never can come close and from whom, year in, year out, you can never get away.

And yet if there be anyone here that has not chosen wisely, remember the high task God has set before you. Don't let that one, man or woman, drag you down; don't give way to cowardice or indolence or recklessness, far less to hatred or despair. Remember, God can make all things new. Who knoweth, O man,

but thou mayest gain thy wife. Oh, what a bond of affection it would be here and hereafter if a man or woman could say, " My partner not only loved me, but so loved me that he showed me Christ and brought me to Him."

And just because God hates to see two yoked unequally, go and tell Him there is now only one thing to be done, and He alone can do it. You may not part, you *must* not part, but the other one of you can become a new creature, can be born again.

But let none of you imagine that it is only in marriage or in business or in recreation that you can be unequally yoked. You may make that mistake though you have no human partner. If you are not one with Christ, if you do not take His yoke, then you are wearing the devil's chains, and sharing his yoke. I have known of partners in business living in different continents repudiating one another's debts, and yet unable to avoid the disastrous issues that resulted. I have known of wives and husbands disclaiming responsibility for one another's debts, and yet either unwilling or unable to break the other bonds that bind them. You cannot do that with the devil. He is a liar and a murderer from the beginning, and though you may say he never tempted you that way, or killed or ruined one of yours, and you can only take him as you find him, I tell you this, if you are willing partners with him in little you must be partners with him in much, and partners with him in all. And can you contemplate calmly *being for ever*

with the devil? Will you make friends for one moment with that being on whose head lies all the misery and sin of every soul that is lost—that being that sought even to ruin and destroy the spotless Lamb of God, Who came to seek and save the lost?

Thirdly and lastly, take this text as a strong ground for comfort and consolation. God says I am not to be unequally yoked; and Christ says I am to take *His* yoke upon me. It is an easy yoke; the burden is light, and the easy fitting of the yoke keeps it light. Oh, why should I not take it instead of that galling yoke that breaks both back and heart? But what a wonderful word that is—*Take My* yoke. Can Christ and I be partners? and not unequal partners? Can the Almighty God and poor me pull together? Can I help my Lord as well as find my Lord help me? Yes—I can have the fullest possible fellowship with Him. The same mind that is in Him can be in me, through the anointing of the One Good Spirit of all grace. Oh, wondrous meaning of that word—His last word to me every time I leave the house of prayer—the *Communion* of the Holy Ghost! To think I can join myself to Him as He journeys from Jerusalem to His Emmaus above and ask Him His purposes and share His plans, aye, constrain Him to come in and abide with us and sup with us, our hearts and His *burning* together, set on fire with the same coal of love, and find not only that He is no stranger to our thoughts and hopes and fears and all the "what things?" that we tell Him

of, but to find they are the things that concern Him most, and that He and we are not only brethren, but one. Oh, the joy of finding that He has further to go, and He does not vanish from my sight, but takes me with Him, and we can humbly yet boldly say, I have left all and followed Thee, to me to live is Christ—and then to hear Him say to me and others like me, "Ye are they which have continued with Me in My temptations, and I appoint unto you a kingdom, even as My Father appointed unto Me, that ye may eat and drink at My table in My Kingdom." And so shall we ever be with the Lord, joint heirs with Him in this life as well as in the life to come—neither He nor we unequally yoked, each worthy of the other, we glorying in Him, and He glorying in us, and not ashamed to call us brethren.

The Temple Rebatements

" For on the outside he made rebatements (narrowed rests) in the wall of the house round about, that the beams should not have hold in the walls of the house.
1 Kings vi, 6. R.V.

Solomon's temple was built on the summit of one of the hills on which Jerusalem stood, on the place, according to Jewish tradition, where Abraham offered the ram caught in the thicket in place of Isaac his son; and certainly on the spot where David saw the angel with the drawn sword ready to destroy Jerusalem after one of David's great sins. The temple commemorated not the scene of victory, but the place of deserved judgment and pardoning mercy; it commemorated the glory, not of man, but of God only. This rocky summit on which it was built had first of all to be levelled, and the ground round about it had to be raised, so that there might be a huge platform, as it were, on which the temple might be built.

The temple itself, the actual structure, was not what we could call a large building, being from end to end only ninety feet long. It was thirty feet broad, and forty-five feet high. It consisted of two parts—the holy place, which was the size

of this church, in which was the altar of burnt offering, the altar of incense, and the table for shew-bread; and then at the western end, the most holy place, which was in shape a cube, thirty feet long, thirty feet broad, and thirty feet high. At the entrance to the holy place was a porch, fifteen feet long, and in front of it two magnificent bronze pillars, six feet in diameter and thirty feet in height.

The temple, you will thus see, was quite a small building compared with many even in our own town, but the money lavished on its construction surpasses anything we read of in history. There are few buildings in the world at this present moment that have cost even two millions; I question if there is even one that could not be replaced for five millions, but this temple of Solomon's cost not simply millions, or tens of millions, but, according to the Book of Chronicles, hundreds and hundreds of millions, for these were the days when the king made silver to be as stones in Jerusalem, or, as it is said in another passage which makes us smile, silver was *nothing accounted* of in the days of Solomon.

Round three of the sides of the temple, that is to say, the two sides and the back, there seems to have been another wall, built at a distance of eight feet or so from the wall of the temple proper, and the space between these two walls was divided into a series of little chambers or rooms. There were three storeys of these, the entrance to the two upper ones, as in many

tenements in our town, being by winding stairs.

But, says our text, the joists that formed the floors and the roofs of these little rooms—and this is the subject I specially wish to talk about this afternoon—were not to be let into the wall of the temple. They were only to rest on what masons call rebatements, or as you and I would say, on ledges. That is to say, the temple wall was of a certain thickness for the first seven or eight feet or so, then there was a ledge, or step in, of twenty inches or thereby, and the wall continued at that reduced height for other seven or eight feet; and then there was another ledge of twenty inches, and a corresponding lessening of the width of the wall till the roof was reached. On these two ledges rested the beams or joists on which the flooring of the second and third storeys rested.

That seems at first sight a very small, and some would say a very trifling and unworthy, if not ridiculous subject to preach about. But it was not too small a thing for God to think about, nor too small a thing for God to write about in His own book. Nor was it too small a thing for God to plan from all eternity, nor too small a thing for Him to make a pattern of and show to David in a solemn hour of vision. *Any* detail in the earliest and grandest building the world ever saw, and possibly ever may see, may well be of some interest to men and women who find a pleasure in beautiful and noble workmanship of any kind. Did not the stones of the

temple built by Herod appeal to Christ's disciples? and did not He Himself gaze at them alike with wonder and, as He thought of the destruction that awaited them, with sorrow, as He left the temple and its precincts for the last time that week in which He was to die?

But when you think of what God meant the temple to be—the most solemn, the most striking, the most tremendous appeal God was to make to men to believe in His Infinite Majesty, His Infinite Holiness, His Infinite Love, till the time should come when He would send His own Son in the flesh to dwell amongst them—I say, when you think of the temple as the last and grandest type of Heaven, and the last and grandest type of Him Who is the only and eternally begotten of the Father, he would surely be a bold man who would say this verse might be worthy God's writing, and perhaps worthy our reading, but not worthy our thinking about.

And further, if you but think of this, that there are *many* things about the temple that you and I would have liked to know, many things, and things of great importance, as for example, the very style of its architecture, the shape of its roof, the way in which that roof was supported, and so on, that are not told us, surely we may feel certain there was some wise reason, some great and loving purpose, in the mention of what seems at the first glance, and even at the second glance, a detail of little moment and small

interest to us—"Thou shalt make narrowed rests that the beams may not be fastened in the walls of the house."

What then is the point God wished us to see when He wrote these words?

Suppose one of you owned a beautiful house in the country and let it to a tenant or a friend, and that friend were to say to you: I want a place in which to store my garden tools, or a place to keep plants in; I want to make an out-house, a lean-to, for odds and ends—for the children to play in if it rains—do you object to my setting it up against the gable? I'll make it neat, and I'll keep it tidy and in good order. Do you object? Well, I suppose, if we were in a good humour and could trust our friend's taste and his habits, we would say, I don't object—only you are not to make any holes in the wall of the house, or injure it in any way. You are not to damage the property. The shed, or outhouse, or lean-to, or whatever you call it, is not to be a fixture, but a thing that is removable and easily removable, and removable at an hour's notice; when it is gone the place is to look as though it had not been there.

The same principle governs *the inside* of our houses. Our landlords let us hang up pictures and ornaments, and even put shelves and brackets on our walls, but they say you must not damage the wall itself, or even the plaster, or the paper, or the paint; you must not injure the fabric, you must leave the house in as good order as you got it.

The temple was to *be* and was to *look* "exceeding magnifical." It was to be the house of God, the gate of Heaven. But it was to be also a *place of prayer* for all nations—our Father's house—and that same great God. Who in the fulness of His love allows the swallow to purchase a nest close by His own altars, allowed all these little rooms to be built for His Own faithful priests and loving servants. They had no rooms in front; they must not come between any man and God, but they were graciously permitted and commanded to have rooms that nestled close by His, they were to encompass Him round about, and there was to *be but a wall between them and Him*.

These rooms meant nearness, they meant fellowship, they meant constant access to God. But they meant also *service*.

Every bit of land in our country is held, according to law, from the King. The ultimate tenure is from him—often only nominally, but sometimes really. There are lands, there are estates, there are dignities, and the man who holds them has to do a certain specified service every year—he may have to give the King at certain times a pair of hawks, or a gold cup, or a silver spur. If he fails to do so, his lands, his titles are legally forfeited and may revert to the King who is supposed to have granted them at first.

So with those priests. Their right to be about their Father's *house* depended on their being continually about their Father's *business*.

They were but tenants, removable if found bad; they were but *workmen*, whose incompetence or idleness would be sufficient ground for immediate discharge. They were men whom God could do without, men whom He could replace, men for whom no successors need be found if He so willed it. Their candlestick was one that could be removed, their crown one that might fade away ; at *any* instant, if they were found unworthy, the sentence might be passed, Their bishoprick let another take—let him go to *his own place*.

And some of you will remember how in the years that were to come the furniture, the household goods, of men were cast out of these very chambers, men themselves chased from the house of God, and others put out of the priesthood. But the foundation of God would still stand sure. His throne is an everlasting one, and His Kingdom one that hath no end.

A little thought will show us that the principle that underlies the statement in the text has many applications. We are to let nothing that is purely personal, purely temporal, purely human, endanger the house, the throne of glory, of God.

Take three illustrations of what I mean. You and I sometimes become discontented with God's dealings with ourselves or others. We see a lad of promise die, the only son of his mother. We see, as in a famous case in Edinburgh some years ago, a man after years of preparation mount the pulpit and preach one sermon about

the love of Christ, and go home to die. We see a missionary lost at sea on his first setting out. We see a young bride returning from her honeymoon a widow. We see a statesman, as men call him, drag a country into war, we see thousands of brave men slain, we see thousands of Rachels refusing to be comforted, and the man who brings all that about stalks unabashed throughout the land, fêted and honoured; we see a ruler wade through blood and still continue to be king; and we are tempted to say : Can there be knowledge of these things in the Most High ?

Or, to come to a lower level and to pettier matters, we are defrauded by a friend, disappointed of a legacy, cheated by a lodger, or a customer, or some other debtor ; abused by some ingrate whom we have helped; and instantly we say : *There's no justice in the world.*

Or again we may be poor and we see others rich; unmarried, lonely, while others have husband, wife, and child. We have ill-health, are never one day without pain, have sleepless nights, and living sorrows; we have a trouble that makes us a horror to the few from whom we cannot hide it, and a source of perplexity and irritation to those to whom we cannot tell it.

Or, to come to a still lower level, we have three days' holiday while another has six weeks, and during our three days we never see the sun till we are entering the train that is to carry us back to our tale of bricks. "Such weather," said a

man in a letter I got one day lately, "I never saw in any summer. I have only had a few dry blinks, and during these I was literally unable to go out because I had been drenched so thoroughly and so repeatedly immediately before that I had nothing decent in which I could go out." And then he adds: "It is enough to make even a good man pause and think."

We have all spoken that way, and what does it come to but simply this—we are questioning God's love. We let our momentary disappointment, our temporary trial and sorrow, blind us to God's eternal love, to the thousand mercies we have never noticed or noticed only to *forget* them, because we always had them and never missed them. We treat our view of things, our hopes, our fears, our desires, our longings, as if they were essential to God's eternal plan and even to His existence and His character. And what is that but fastening the beams of our little chambers into the walls of our God's holy place? Is not Job's attitude the right one: "Though He *slay me*, yet will I trust in Him"?

Take a second illustration: Do we not sometimes give some man too big a place in our view of things? I do not know if it is as common a thing to say as it used to be—I hope it is not, for it is even more foolish than it is wrong—but people have said of some man—some minister, some elder, some father, or mother—I can't believe that person could do a wrong thing. I say that is a *fearful* thing to say—it

is pinning our faith on man, that faith that can rest only in God. And our God is a jealous God. His glory He will *not* give to another, neither His praise to ministers, or parents, or any other graven image that you or I may set up. Cursed is the man that putteth confidence in man, or maketh flesh his arm. You must *not* fasten the beams of any man's house or character into the walls of that city that rests on the one tried, elect, precious corner-stone. You must never say of any man—no matter who he be—that he and God stand or fall together.

Take a third illustration. Men sometimes put some doctrine, some *principle*, as they call it, some belief, some custom, some tradition, as if it were on a level with the great essentials of the Christian faith. There are—blessed be God—essentials; and there are things—blessed be God—that are non-essentials—even in doctrine, but still more in questions purely of order and discipline. I have known people, good people, not people who simply thought themselves good, but people who had a good report of all men and of the truth itself also, who would not enter a church because the people in it sat at prayer; or because they stood when they sang. Now, even supposing both these things were sinful, and suppose—and a very fearful supposition it is—that a man can only pray standing or kneeling, and dare never sing the praise of God when he is on his feet—that the moment he begins to bless God, or, in the language of the

103rd Psalm, calls upon angels to bless God with him, he must first secure a seat if not for them at least for himself—but the supposition is simply monstrous. Is attitude an essential part of salvation? A few years ago many people were vexed and many were humiliated to read that Dr. Phillips Brooks, one of the greatest preachers in America, found himself unable to preach because he had no gown, and when a gown was fetched, was still unable to preach, because he was a man over six feet in height and the gown had been made for a very little man. To say that I cannot have fellowship with other Christians unless they sit when I sit and stand when I stand; still more to say that I cannot have fellowship with my Saviour unless in one exercise I stand and in another sit—what is that but building wood, hay, stubble on the Rock of Ages!—fastening the beam of my little cell in the walls of God's Jerusalem! What is it but saying that Christ is dead in vain unless you sit or stand as your fathers did, or rather as one or two generations of them did during the last 300 years!

Or take a matter of feeling. I was advising a woman some time ago to go to a certain church. "No," she said. "I'm only a servant, as they say, and if I were to enter that church you speak of the ladies would draw in their skirts." And I confess the way she made the gesture convinced me it was one she had either practised herself or seen others practise. "No," she said, "enter that church I never shall." What could I say?

I might have said: "I thought you had greater self-respect than you seem to have. You, a servant, with better food, with a happier home, with a finer training for all that fits a woman for a woman's noblest work, with greater opportunities of making many happy, with fewer temptations to tell lies and speak flattering words, than any girl who stands behind a counter, I thought you had greater self-respect than to heed a sneer of one who spoke without thinking." But might I not also have said, "Do you tell me there is any woman in that church who would do so? That is bad news; let me now tell you good news. Christ will spread His skirt over you. Is not that more than amends for the biggest insults anyone could pour on you? Will you make one woman's momentary pique or jealousy or thoughtlessness—the outcome it may be of disappointment or bitterness of soul—overbalance the invitation or outweigh the command of the Son of God, Who loved you from all eternity and died upon the Cross for you? Will you build a little beam—a little mote—like that into the fabric of the eternal love?"

Our text represents the priests as at most but lodgers, tenants at will, outsiders. And in strange contrast with that, in the chapter we read at the prayer meeting, we are told of the angels, the cherubim of glory, that they not only have a place inside the temple, but even inside the most holy place, and on the holiest spot in all that place. They sit upon the very mercy-seat,

and more than that, as the R.V. shows us—of *one piece with the mercy-seat* shall ye make the cherubim on the two ends thereof. Oh, what boldness of access is there ! Oh, what concord ! Oh, what fellowship ! Oh, what oneness ! Meantime, for a little, you and I are lower than the angels, and often far, far from them and far from God, so that Christ may sometimes well say to us : " What have *I* to do *with thee ?* Thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of man. Get thee behind me, Satan."

But there are moments, too, and there are parts of my being and parts of my life and parts of my thought and experience, when I come very close to Him—when I can grip the horns of the altar and kneel at the foot of the mercy-seat in humble faith that will take no denial—moments when I can lean my head upon His very breast and put questions He *must* answer—moments when I thrust my hand into the hole in His side —moments when I can say, Who shall separate me from the love of Christ ?—moments when I can say : My life is hid with Christ in God, my life is bound up in the bundle of life with the Lord my God. The winds may blow and the rain descend, and the floods beat upon my house, but fall it never shall, for I have digged deep and built upon a Rock. Christ is mine and I am His, and in a little I shall be no longer a buttress outside the wall, nor even a pillar before the porch, but I shall be caught up and made a pillar in the house of my God, a pillar

in that temple of which the glory is the Lamb Himself. His name shall be on my forehead. I shall see no longer His back parts, but His face. I shall go no more out. I shall be for ever with the Lord.

Belshazzar Weighed in the Balance

Tekel; Thou art weighed in the balances and art found wanting.—Daniel v, 27.

That handwriting on the wall was an open letter addressed to King Belshazzar, to begin with, but it was addressed also to every man and woman, every guest, guard, attendant, spectator, present on that night of doom, addressed further to everyone to whom then or since the report of it should come.

If there is anyone here more than another who is Belshazzar it is your minister, who last Friday completed the twenty-fifth year of his ministry in this place. He certainly has been weighed in the balances and found wanting. But the twenty-five or thirty men and women with whom he has campaigned all these years, if they are Daniels in one sense, are also Belshazzars in another, and whether Daniels or Belshazzars are equally come to judgment. And you who have been connected with this congregation for a more or less shorter time than that, yes, even you who may be here for the first and last time in your lives, if there be any such, have all the same handwriting against you.

That is the first thing. Therefore I say this afternoon: This weighing is inevitable. All of us are being weighed. Most of you have

taken strangers round our quays and docks, which is, as Robert Louis Stevenson says, the most interesting kind of loitering, and you have noticed how keen they were to stand and watch the weighing of a sugar cargo. There was a fine air of business about it; there was more—there was a touch of solemnity, and whether one looked at the men who guided the sacks down the smooth planks, or the men who lifted them on to the barrows, or the men who hoisted and swung them off and on the scales, or the man whose task it was to adjust the weights and mark the score with his chalk on the beam, or the clerk who watched and reckoned from the window of his sentry box, or the official who gouged out samples, or the other who made them up—I say there was a touch of solemnity about the whole procedure, and in that solemnity every man participated. And when our guest said to us, Are they weighing the sacks? we felt ourselves a certain greatness of thought when we answered, Yes, every bag is weighed and sampled. We were for the moment in touch with the infinite side of things.

I fancy it is that intimation of immortality that makes a child, whether boy or girl, look with wonder at every man who stands behind a counter, and makes it thrice happy when amongst its birthday gifts it reckons a pair of scales. To such a moment, learning from our Lord, we may apply the Psalmist's words—I said, Ye were called gods.

Everything in the world makes and leaves its

mark. Men of science tell us that if you but touch a rod of metal with your finger-nail that rod expands and contracts, it gets longer or shorter according to the measure of the difference between its temperature and yours. That is not mere theory; the expansion or contraction has been actually measured. In like manner every action is weighed, and that weight is registered ; or, as we say, people are always taking our measure. I do not wish to set you a-judging one another, but there are no two people within sight or touch or hearing of each other here this afternoon who have not formed an opinion about each other—that is, they have taken one another's measure, they have weighed one another. No person could come into the seat beside you, or hand you a book, without being valued. And if you say, That's not the case, for I never thought one moment about the person who is sitting beside me, you are only proving the more clearly what I say. The letter you drop into a pillar-box without remark is as certainly weighed by you as the one you ask the Post Office clerk to weigh. Your judging is none the less real because it is immediate, instinctive, unconscious, contemptuous, or indifferent.

We judge one another, we cannot help doing it, because we are really doing each other good or ill, whether we know it or mean it or not.

And if we are doing good or ill to one another much more are we doing it to that God to whom every one of us belongs. We touch one another at one or two or three points, we touch God at

every point, and every touch is felt and felt for ever, and therefore it is registered and weighed.

But here the judgment of God differs from that of man, because it is absolutely fair. That is, the scales are fair, and the weights are fair. I remember as a boy being one of a crowd that stood staring at a pair of scales in a case at an exhibition, over which were printed the words, "These scales can be turned by a *human hair*." These were scales meant for common use. Many of you know better than I do what can be done in this direction, but I presume no chemist could carry on his investigations if his scales answered no finer test than that. We live, as we are often told, in an age that has found out that the realm of knowledge is the realm of the decimal. When General Gordon was setting out to be Governor of the Soudan, he said, "I will try, by God's grace, to hold the balance level." But that is just what it is impossible for a human mind to do.

I remember a great trial in America—the trial of a young millionaire for shooting a man—an architect of world-wide fame—in cold blood. Two hundred jurors were summoned, and a great deal of time was spent examining each juror whose name turned up in the lot, as to whether his mind was perfectly unbiased. In our own country, if there was, say, a murder trial, and a man who was called to act on the jury, and was anxious to get rid of the task, were to say: I have been reading about this case, and I have made up my mind that the

man is guilty, he would be promptly challenged and dismissed, aye, and dismissed with ignominy, not only as a man conceivably untruthful and undoubtedly devoid of self-respect, naked and unashamed, but also as a man ignorant of the most fundamental rights of his fellow-man, the right to be tried before he is judged. In America every juror is examined and cross-examined. Is his mind made up on this point or on that? Has he any special views as to insanity or not? Last week man after man was called, put through his facings, and after two days' work only two jurors with perfectly unbiased minds had been discovered.

Consciously or unconsciously there is none of us absolutely fair-minded. The judicial is the rarest variety of mind. "You will get," said a great statesman, "ten generous men for one just one." God and God only can hold the balance level, and it is at once the most perfect proof of our Saviour's Divinity, as well as the seal set on His sinless humanity, that it is into His hands God the Father has put all judgment.

But further there must be just weights as well as even scales. Four hundred years before the coming of our Lord, we are told, great hordes of Gauls swarmed over into Italy from France, and in due time came to Rome and took it, after a seven months' siege. It was the hot, unhealthy season of the year, and after a while Brennus, the leader of the Gauls, offered to withdraw his troops if 1,000 lb. weight of gold were paid as ransom. Hard as the conditions

were, they were accepted. The temples were ransacked, men and women opened their private stores, and at last the gold was brought and laid in an enormous scale. On the other scale the weights were laid, and then, the story goes, Brennus dashed in his sword along with them, crying in his insolence, *Vae victis* (woe to the vanquished !). So sometimes in our ignorance and cruel misjudging of God we have thought that that is what He does too. He calls Himself the God by whom actions are weighed, yet we imagine the weighing is all a pretence, for the issue is irrevocably fixed and determined, not by any weights, but by the strong hand of our impotence and the irresistible sword of a sovereignty that is irresponsible, and cannot be gainsaid. No, my dear friends, sovereign He is, and He giveth not account of any of His matters meantime, but He is as just and as holy, as honest and as fair, as He is sovereign. Justice and judgment are the habitation of His throne. No throne that has fellowship with iniquity can have fellowship with God. If a man were sent to hell believing in God's absolute holiness he would be a happier and a greater being than an unjust God who dwelt in heaven—if such a thing were conceivable.

We are to be judged according to that which we have received, and not according to that which we have not received.

Who can sum up in a few moments all that we have received in time from a God Who did nothing but think about us and make prepara-

tion for us from all eternity? It seems, and it is, presumption in the highest to reckon up all that God has done for us. And yet, to guide your thoughts, and magnify His free grace, let me remind you of the inheritance we got at birth, godly parents and ancestors who prayed for us before we had any being, fathers who worked for us in summer's heat and winter's cold, before the sun rose and after it was set; let me remind you of your mother's love, and all that that suggests, recalls, involves; of bodies fearfully and wonderfully made, of minds of large discourse, looking before and after; let me remind you of the mercies of every day, food, raiment, shelter, and every one of these the product of more thought and skill and love than can be reckoned; let me remind you of all that is involved in being a Scotsman, a Briton, a European; let me remind you of all the labours and examples of scholars, inventors, soldiers, mariners, statesmen, martyrs, saints; let me remind you of all the experiences of others that you and I might have profited by; let me remind you above all of God's commandments, promises, entreaties, encouragements given in His word and providence, specially those secret personal dealings of His Spirit; let me remind you of Christ's death upon the Cross; let me remind you of His tears; let me remind you of your own vows, your own promises to God, your own pledged word. Let me remind you of all the joy and admiration and blessing you have received when you did well, and all the shame and penitence

when you did ill; let me remind you of the shouts and cries of the great cloud of witnesses who watch your struggles even more than if they were their own; let me remind you, in a word, of all your gifts and training, the expectations formed by others, the daily, hourly, continual tasks and opportunities, work of the same kind as Christ had, and God has, and the Spirit has, and honours equal to those won by the Lamb that was slain—these are some of the weights in the one scale, the weights by which we are to be judged.

But if no man can reckon these, just as little can any man reckon what goes into the other scale. It is you and I, we ourselves, our thoughts, words, actions, our neglect to think and speak and do, with all their effects, with all their consequences, upon us and upon others, directly, indirectly, while we are living, and after we are dead, through time and through eternity—I say it is you and me with our eternal history that are put into the opposing scale. And who but Christ has power to open and eyes to read that roll, written inside and outside, and covered to its last line and utmost margin ?

But there is a third and last point I wish you to observe. This weighing, while it is inevitable and continuous, is very slow and deliberate. There's nobody here who couldn't write the words of our text in a minute, most men could write them in ten seconds; it took God a whole hour. *And why ?*

Don't imagine that there was any difficulty

in judging to which side the balance was inclined. We have all of us had a difficulty in weighing a letter. The Post Office officials have told us at times that the thing was touch and go—they had to wait a moment to let the balance settle, and even then they almost blushed to tell us it would need another stamp. I said this was the age of the decimal, or of what President Bramwell of the British Association once called the age that knows the value of the next-to-nothing. But there's no place for the decimal in religion. We don't miss heaven by a hair's breadth. We lose a train by five seconds, we are thrust back even when our hand is on the door and we would enter in, because the train is in motion and we were late; the student misses his prize because he gained but 49 marks out of the 100, and 50 is the minimum. But between good and bad, between a good man and a bad man, as between heaven and hell, there is nothing less than a great gulf fixed.

God's delay in writing was *not* due to uncertainty.

It was due first of all to His pain. You can imagine a sovereign hesitating to sign a death-warrant, taking up the pen and laying it down again; you can imagine a man shrinking from the signature that means surrender of all he has; you can imagine a mother or a father forced to sign the truth that meant a son's dishonour or a daughter's shame—and saying, Don't ask me: must I do it? Aye, you can imagine a mother's hand so shaking and her tears so falling that her

signature was all but illegible; but oh, the shaking of that hand as it wrote the words of doom, the hand that wrote and loved to write—I am the Lord thy God; the hand that was pierced and loved to be pierced for our redemption.

And it wrote slowly because it could hardly believe that it was writing truly. I suppose most of us have paused in the middle of a sentence and in the middle of a signature. Surely, surely, there's a mistake—how can that be? It is like one adding up figures who expected a balance, and a handsome balance, over, and there's an appalling deficit. We say—Wait a minute; am I right? I can't believe it. And so God writes slowly, and cries to heaven and earth to be horribly astonished.

The son of the great and good Sir James Paget tells us that they knew as they sat in the room beside him when their father finished writing a letter. The slow etching sound of his pen gave place to a swishing sound as he signed his name. And so I may say it is with God. He likes to come quickly, leaping over mountains, skipping over hills, but with wrath and anger slow. When He gives blessing, He gives good measure, pressed down, heaped up, shaken together, running over, overwhelming the measure with the ridicule of his boundless love; but when He writes a bitter thing, His fingers forget their cunning.

But God was not yet done writing, and so again it was that He wrote slowly.

Belshazzar had lost the kingdom, had lost

it may be the special crown he was sent into the world to win, but there was more than the kingdom still left to him. There was his own soul. There was eternity—the crown incorruptible that fadeth not away. So these words were not necessarily the final ones after all. The Spirit of God, we know, still strove with Belshazzar. There is something, I think, unspeakably pathetic in the last action of that man. Daniel had denounced his sins, had proclaimed his doom, and yet the king, loyal to his word, rewards and honours the faithful man; he has but little to give him, dying, doomed man as he was. His kingdom was to last but one hour more, but while that hour lasted Daniel should have the second highest place.

What else the Spirit of God did that hour we do not know. For aught we can tell, it may be Belshazzar took the cup of salvation and drank of the fruit of the vine with Christ that night in the Kingdom of God.

Against you, and certainly against me, there is a bitter writing visible to all that look. Many a crown as man and minister I have lost for ever. But the account is not yet closed, and the last word is not yet spoken. My sins and yours, the devil's clamour and the world's judgment, may well condemn us, and our own hearts, like that Gaulish chieftain of whom I told you, may dash down the scale against us; yet just as at that moment 2,300 years ago there came a valiant general, Camillus by name, and redeemed the city, so even now our Kinsman may come—

and He will come if we but ask Him in shame and penitence and humble faith; and He will remove our guilt and sin and put in their stead His own righteousness, and in one instant the hand-writing that is against us will be blotted out. And who then shall lay anything to our charge if we are elect, precious, seeing it is God that justifies us, and the only one that could condemn, even our Judge, is Himself our Advocate with the Father and ever liveth to make intercession for us ?

The Still, Small Voice

And after the fire a still small voice.
1 Kings, xix, 12.

THERE are at least three of God's attributes most clearly brought before us in these four words—a quiet, gentle, whisper: (1) His gentleness; (2) His calmness; and (3) His love.

Before the still small voice there came, we are told, a wind, a great, strong wind. Most of us think we know a little of the noise the wind can make. We have heard it moaning, sighing, whistling, so eerily, through the tree-tops and the telegraph wires. We have heard it as we stood on the quay shrieking through the rigging of some great ship that lay safely moored against the quay walls. We have listened in what we should have called the safe seclusion of our homes to the distant cry of the wind on a January or February night, and turned and looked at one another as we sat in the light of the fire listening to its ever-increasing roar as it came rushing on and on and on, threatening, as it were, to overpower us, and we have stopped breathing till it was passed, and have said, Wasn't that awful? Did you ever hear anything like that? And then we have said what must it be in the Channel to-night, and what must it

be at sea? And we have said well, and good was it for us if there and then, as we sat shuddering, someone without preface broke into prayer for those at sea. I say it was well for us if our father or our mother cried out, O God, be with all sailors and all others who are at sea this night. A storm of wind and rain is appalling enough even to those who hear it from under cover, and specially when the noise swells every instant. When it grows in force and doubles its fury, and becomes louder, louder, and louder, its next attack seems to be more than men and women can listen to. I believe, says one, describing such a storm, that even a rain that became heavier for every second for ten minutes would drive many listeners mad. But what must it be at sea? In the *Cornhill Magazine* some time ago there was an article entitled "Through the Vortex of a Cyclone," written by a man who saw it and came through it on a voyage on the western coast of South Africa in the four-masted barque, *Golconda*, grain laden, homeward-bound from San Francisco. The article is a very powerful one, and I am sure many of the young people here would have a fearful joy in reading the story of the storm from the first warnings that came one December day, 17 deg. south of the Line, when the officers of the ship first noticed a strange, unnatural, brick-red glare in the sky, and then a little after there was an ominous sound like low, strange growling far away in the north-east, a low, hollow, moaning noise . . . like a wild beast growling, that sounded indescribably dree.

Twenty-four hours after, when the cyclone had burst upon them, and the sails had been blown clean away, and the water was breaking on board 100 tons at a time, the roaring and howling of the cyclone was so incredibly loud that no word spoken or shouted out on deck, even though right into one's ear, could be heard, so that the utmost they could do to convey ideas to one another was to make signs. "Imagine," says the writer, "a noise as loud as the loudest thunder you have ever heard; then imagine this noise to last hour after hour, without intermission, and to have in it a hideously threatening, hoarse note, and blending with this a constant yelling scream that rises at times to such a pitch that the very ear-drums seem to experience pain. Indeed, so vastly loud was the noise," he says, "that I did not even hear the topmasts carry away, though the sound of a large spar breaking will make as great a noise as the report of a big gun, and I saw things lifted bodily off the poop, hurled into the air, and then descend on to the main deck, but with a crash that was inaudible."

All this that I have said and quoted refers only to one aspect of the wind—the *noise* of it. But what about the *force*?

The cyclone through which the *Golconda* passed, from which she emerged a battered, miserable wreck, was such a storm as is only met with once in a thousand lives, but it was as nothing compared with that wind whose devastating force Elijah watched from the shelter

of his cave. It was perhaps the fiercest wind that ever blew on earth, for we are told it rent the mountains and brake the rocks in pieces. Yet after all it, too, was as nothing compared with what God might do, and compared with what God would have to do, if He wished to show the utmost greatness of His power. All this was, as Job says, but a whisper, and one can understand the words: The Lord was not in the wind. The wind in which God might be, the wind that would show the fulness of His power, the wind that would be worthy of Him Who is the *Almighty*, has never blown on sea or land. The earth itself would be shifted from its place, mountains driven along the alley-ways of heaven like sticks and stones and like withered leaves and dust in an equinoctial gale.

And as this wind surpassed all other winds that ever blew, so the earthquake and the fire, the thunder and the lightning, must have been such as were never seen before or since. Mount Sinai, thousands of feet in height, skipped like a little lamb, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. No part of earth can give room and scope enough for Him to walk in Who holds the sea in the hollow of His hand, Who at the beginning, made countless worlds, and keeps them in their swiftly moving courses night and day. And as for the thunder and the fire, such rattling, crashing, booming, reverberating peals on peals were never heard as fell that day on Elijah's awe-struck ear, as they echoed and re-echoed and re-echoed over and over again amid the crags and peaks and

clefts of the granite rocks of Horeb. And yet how faint an impression they give of the voice of the Lord God that is full of glorious majesty—that voice like the sound of mighty waters, that could make itself heard not only from pole to pole, and from heaven to earth, from star to star, but from and to the remotest bounds of the created universe. And fierce and terrifying as were those devouring flames of consuming fire that filled the cave's mouth with brightness above the sun's, what are they, what would they be even if multiplied a thousand-millionfold, in comparison with the fire that goes before Him who kindled every sun and star and made them flash with light that has illuminated heaven, not for one brief hour, but for centuries and tens of centuries of years beyond all reckoning?

Mere loudness, it is evident to you all, is apt to defeat itself. You have sometimes heard a person say of some speaker—he spoke so loudly that I couldn't make out a word he said; and Tennyson, you may remember, says of Edith, the daughter of Sir Aylmer Aylmer :

> Her fresh and innocent eyes
> Had such a star of morning in their blue
> That all neglected places of the field
> Broke into nature's music when they saw her.

and then he adds :

> Low was her voice, but won mysterious way
> Thro' the sealed ear to which a louder one
> Was all but silence.

I remember a curious instance of that in my own experience. Close to the city of Agra, in the North West Province of India, there is a mausoleum built nearly 300 years ago by Emperor Shah Jehan for himself and his wife. It took twenty thousand men two and twenty years to build. It is made of white marble, and is reckoned one of the most beautiful and everyway wonderful buildings in the world. It is not only, to use Dr. Johnson's description, worth seeing, but it is worth going to see. I remember the day we arrived in Agra. It was late in the afternoon, and rain was threatening, but we never thought of waiting till next day. The tomb lies a mile from the city, and as we were hastening to the place, to our great dismay at first we heard thunder; to our dismay, I said, but only for a moment, for we knew there were few such echoes in the world as that which is to be heard as one stands under its glorious dome. And it was thundering! And so we counted ourselves superlatively happy—we should hear the echo at its best—the echo of God's own Voice. So we made the more haste there, happy in arriving when the thunder was at its loudest. But the thunder made *no* echo—the noise drowned, killed itself. We heard nothing but a loud clatter; and then the storm passed away and the thunder ceased, and presently a Hindoo attendant began to sing in the plaintive manner of his race, and *then* we heard the echo—an echo that lingered so long that we could not tell when it ended,

and ended gradually and so sweetly that what was echo and what was only the memory of an echo there was not one of us could tell. It was a wonderful illustration of this text—God was not in the wind, but in the still small voice that followed after.

There is a time of life when noise is a necessary part of merriment—when mere noise itself is all the joy one wants. To bang a door, to shout, to make a din of any kind, is a boy's idea of consummate achievement; as the whoop is the mark of savage warfare. There is a stage in taste when the chiefest instrument of music is the big drum, and the man to be most gazed at the man who beats it, and the more he flourishes and intertwines his arms the more he is admired; a stage in taste when the greatest orator is the man from whose chest and lungs and throat there comes the biggest volume of sound. There is another and a later time of life, and another and a better stage in taste, when the most impressive part of a military display is the absolute silence in the ranks, and the most effective piece of music is the softest and the tenderest, and the true orator is he whose whisper moves the outmost ring of his audience as the leaves of the forest are stirred by a gentle breeze. It is this gentleness, this silence that is the mark of power. Man makes more noise, someone has said, when he strikes a match than God does when He makes the sun to rise.

Yes, it is here we see the power, and majesty, and infinite greatness of God. He accommodates

Himself to our weakness. He speaks so as to be heard. He attunes His voice to suit our ear; it is His gentleness that makes us great—is it not His gentleness that makes Himself great, too? That God Whose cry is to rouse all the sheeted dead at the Judgment Day can speak to the tiniest insect ever revealed by microscope, can speak to it and be heard and understood.

This passage tells us secondly of the calmness and peace and imperturbability of God. Most of us, I am sure, have noticed and wondered at the leisurely way the guardians of the peace come when they are summoned to disperse a crowd or quell a disturbance in the streets. Two men, four men, ten men are fighting, women are shrieking, it looks as if murder were in the air, and suddenly we hear the cry, Here are the police! And forthwith we see a stalwart man come without haste. We wonder at his slowness, but that slowness and that coolness impress and curb and restrain us all. Here is one who comes with authority, calmly, deliberately, with all his wits about him, and the situation is saved.

Lord Wolseley, in his "Soldier's Pocket-Book," lays it down as a maxim to be kept in mind by all aides-de-camp or others who may be entrusted with messages from the Commander-in-Chief upon the battle-field—that they display no fear and show no excitement, however critical the moment may be. An officer tearing along on horseback with his teeth set, galloping as if for dear life, plays havoc with a regiment's morale; and spreads wherever he goes the

infection of his own alarm. The wise messenger will ride with a smile upon his face, waving a kindly salute to some brother officer, or tossing a merry word to some old comrade. That happy glance, that cheery word reassure and comfort and hearten and embolden all who see or hear it. That gallant officer is more than a reinforcement to every battalion he may pass, and to the whole army whom he serves.

But who shall estimate the value of a Commander-in-Chief upon whose cheeks fear never sets its pallid mark? Seven and thirty years ago, when the German Army was encamped in its wide circle round Paris, there was a day when it looked as if General Amelles de Paladine might break through the Prussian-German ring. There was hurrying to and fro amid the vast crowd of useless princes and hangers-on at Versailles. Luggage, specie, trophies, all the numberless books and papers needed for an army, were hastily got together. For the first time in that great campaign the Germans began to think of a retreat. Even Bismarck himself has told us how he almost began to fear disaster, but duty brought him into the presence of Von Moltke, and Von Moltke was as calm and bright and self-composed as ever. "I offered him," says Bismarck, "my cigar-case. Von Moltke took it, looked at the cigars, handled them, as if he had nothing on his mind, but when I saw he deliberately chose the best and took it with a smile, I felt that all was well."

Unworthy in some respects as these illustra-

tions are, they may yet serve to show in measure what I mean by the calmness of God. The glory, the purposes, the eternal work of God, the welfare and salvation of the world, were bound up with the history of Israel. And Israel had abandoned God. Mercy, judgment, miracles of grace and miracles of wrath—all, all had been tried, and more than tried, in vain. Ahab and Jezebel were defying the Almighty to His face. Elijah, who had stood alone against the world, had now lost heart, and was wishing he was dead. Even the sight of Horeb, with all its memories, memories all the richer for the five marvellous centuries over which they stretched, brought him no comfort and no change of soul. "I, even I only am left, and they seek my life." And there came that voice that seemed to say: Be still, and know that I am God. I am That I am. The purpose of God still stands. Elijah was no leader of a forlorn hope. There were good men and true in training even then to carry on his work, and carry on God's work. Did he say, I only am left? Oh, but he was far wrong in his reckoning. I only? There were 7,000 men in Israel whose knees had never bowed to Baal, whose mouths had never kissed him. Seven thousand left! Yes, and God was left!

Does not God seek to still our fears in this same way? You and I become impatient, there is no sign of His coming, the days are passing, they seem almost past, it looks as if God were late. What's to be done? And God bids us lie down and sleep. And just as the timid

passenger at sea hears twice every hour the cry of the seaman to the officer upon the bridge—"Lights burning; all's well!"—and turns round reassured, so every distant star that shines proclaims that still God reigns. The constellations rise and set and are there, because He has named them every one. And the morning breaks, and the sun comes forth rejoicing at his appointed time as calmly as he did in our most prosperous days. "Arise and eat": every meal-time is a time of rest, and a time of promise, it is heard saying to us, as Paul said to his comrades tossing up and down in Adria, "I pray you to take some meat; for this is for your health; for there shall not an hair fall from your head."

Lastly, the words tell us of the love of God. John tells us that when his Lord said, "One of you shall betray Me," he was lying with his head upon His Master's breast, and lying just as he was, he asked Him who it was. So here the still small voice that puts the homely question—What are you doing here? and names the prophet; and tells the prophet the unknown present and the unseen future, is the voice of friendship and affection. The wind that rent the mountains had a thousand auditors, the earthquake melted many a heart with fear, the fire that made Mount Sinai smoke as in the days of old was doubtless seen from far and near, but the still small voice was the whisper of individual and personal communion.

Oh, the longing there is in the heart of God to have someone to speak to, someone to whom

He can say—sure of the answer He desires—Lovest thou Me? Seven thousand saints in Israel, but only one Elijah—one only to whom God and God's honour had been all in all, and more than all, and dearer than life itself. Almost 2,000 years had passed since God and Enoch had walked and talked as bosom friends on earth together, and so happy had been their mutual joy that for him God had abolished death before the time—him God had made the earnest and firstfruits of the finished work of His own dear Son—him God had made the first entrant in the fulness of being—the first full partaker of the full glory of eternity. Oh, the uniqueness of the honour! Oh, the greatness of that joy—to be sole companion in fullest fellowship with the Three-One God for 2,000 years! And now shortly God was to take another of the sons of men into that same high fellowship. Does it seem strange that God should anticipate the joy and be unable as it were to keep His secret any longer? That conference on Horeb was as it were the meeting of two lovers on the eve before their marriage day.

But 700 years were still to come before a greater than Elias was to tread the earth—even God's own Son. That Son was to die upon the accursed tree, bearing God's wrath and all the world's sin. To that dread hour the Son of God was in the fulness of the time to dedicate Himself. On the mount of the transfiguration He was to see some of the fruit of His eternal love, and His obedience to the death. Two men from Heaven

were to meet Him there, and let Him see of the travail of His soul. Were men worth dying for, even when they were redeemed? These two were the fruit of that land of promise; they were part of the reward of all His labour. The sight of them was to be at once the pledge of His Father's confidence in Him, and the pledge of His Father's faithfulness.

And as He thought of that other, even Moses, with whom He had spoken face to face seven centuries ago in that same mount, is it any wonder that God could wait no longer, but must speak even now into the very ear of the man who was to do so much for His well-beloved Son?

You remember what Hiram the King of Tyre said when he came out to see the cities which Solomon had given him; and they pleased him not. And he said: What cities are these which thou hast given me, my brother? And he called them the land of Cabul to this day.

So on that mount Christ came to see the inheritance that He was to purchase with His blood. What if they had pleased Him not? What if Moses and Elias that day had failed to stand the test, and Christ had said: Is this all I am to get? Is that the very best? Is this the fruit of all My labour? Was it for these and such as these We have planned and purposed and toiled and travailed through all eternity?

And as God thought of these men—of their noble bearing—of the encouragement they were to give to Christ—as He thought of this, that on them depended, if I may say so, the question

as to whether Christ would still go on and finish the work He had to do, I say, can you wonder that God took to His bosom the man who was to help His Son to die that death on which everything God had depended ?

Yet there is Room

And yet there is room.—Luke xiv, 22.

Do you think we will get in? Are you sure there will be room for us? These are questions we have all put many a time, especially when we were young. It was perhaps a summer day, a lovely July morning, to which we had long been looking forward. A hundred things, we had feared, might happen, but nothing had happened. All was well, there was no trouble in the house, we were all up, our parents had not slept too long or forgotten to waken us, the morning calm and grey, no fear of rain. Oh, the delightful bustle, our very eagerness hindering a little our preparations; how we danced about and everybody was in every other body's way; but we were all happy, everybody happier than another. The holiday, the trip, the excursion, was going to pass from the realm of dreams into reality. But there was still one fear, one *great* fear in the way. What if the boats were too crowded! What if all the carriages in the train were full! What if there wasn't room for us, or only room for one or two! We who are grown up have all at times had a similar anxiety. And we know the answer that has been given us. Is it some meeting we wish to be present at? Ah, well—it's an enormous building—there will be lots of

room—no fear of that. Is it accommodation for a night we wish? There are 600, 1,200 rooms in the place. You're all right.

Or take another illustration. You go to a big city like Glasgow. Miles and miles of streets, miles and miles of shops. You are jostled off the pavement by the crowds of passers by; you are chased back to it off the street by the endless stream and rush of vehicles. You feel as if there were no room for anybody. And yet, wait and see. Let but a few hours pass, the busiest street will be deserted, you will look in vain for someone to direct you; from the very place where now you can hear nothing for the roar of traffic you shall hear the footfall of the only man in sight, almost a quarter of a mile away. But leave the city even by day, and before you have gone twenty miles, or ten or five, you will reach some little eminence from which in a circle of many miles you shall hardly see a single soul. Scotland overcrowded? No room for people? Climb our own Whin Hill, cross over to the Gareloch, sail round the Cumbraes, take a look at Arran—and yet there is room.

The 1,500 millions of people that are now alive upon the earth could easily find standing-room at the same moment in our own little Scotland; Europe would hold at once, 400 to the square mile, all the men and women that have lived since that first Sabbath morning when God looked on Adam and on Eve. Yet Europe is but a small part of the world, a sixtieth part of it. And how small a thing is this world itself

compared with space! If there were as many worlds as there are drops of water in that little bit of sea we can look at from our own doors, they would not fill the space that is opened out to our vision any clear starlit night. And if you let your imagination wander, as God bids it to, and think of the stars that are only visible from the star that is farthest off from us, and of the suns and moons and countless solar systems that are in turn only visible from it—I say, think of all these, these many mansions in our Father's house, would it not be passing strange if in a house like that an entrance should be denied hereafter to any one of earth's inhabitants on the ground that there was *no room*?

That is the first answer to our fears. Think of the *size* of heaven; and wherever God is, that is heaven. Why, if a poor, hungry soul were chased off a five miles' stretch of solitary beach on which he had sat down to rest, on the ground that there was *no room*, might he not well say, There may be some other reason, and even conceivably some good reason, but for the sake of your own character, don't say it's because there isn't room?

Think secondly of the time there has been for preparation. The God Who made all these worlds, and worlds of worlds, is not only omnipresent, filling, occupying, glorifying all the space there is—and space just means wherever God can be or go—but He is eternal. And isn't that a word that overwhelms the mind? I heard a boy in Brisbane Street three weeks ago say to

his companions—they were evidently talking about the time that was still left for a game that night : "An hour is an awfully wee bit of time"; and that is true; but that boy, however long or however short a time he may be spared, will find out some day how big a bit of time an hour may be and always is—will find out, as Juliet said to Romeo when she was parting from him for a little :

> "I must hear from thee every *day* in the hour,
> For in a minute there are many days."

Aye, he will find out how many years can be in one moment for a human being. But think how many years God lives every day. He shares the life of every being He has made, and if all the days lived by men in this world are added up, you will find, in this barest and most prosaic style of computation, that every day in actual tickings of the clock God lives at least four million years. But if we think again of the memory of all the dead, and of all the angels, and of all the creatures God has made that live and move and have their being on earth and in the air and sea, in all their heights and in all their depths, do we not feel that with God there is an uncountable eternity in every moment in the day ?

And then let your imagination pass to that long, long, long eternity before time was—that eternity that is so long that a million times a million years, and these multiplied again by the highest archangelic intellect through another million years—

or quadrillion years, if that means anything more to you—are but, compared with eternity itself, as the small dust of the balance. If heaven is big enough, surely eternity has been long enough, to make ready for us all. We sometimes say a guest was unexpected. "We were taken aback. You should have given me time—more time!" "I hadn't time," said an Englishman once to a native African chief, "I hadn't time." "You had all the time there is," was the unanswerable reply. And might we say of God, He has had all the eternities there have been—surely He had time and time enough to make room for us.

But a third thing that proves there is room is the vastness of His preparations. And how shall one speak of all that is meant by that? There was infinite scope, infinite power, infinite time, but there was also infinite heart. Who shall describe the goodwill of God? We all know what love can do in one brief hour to make ready for an unexpected guest. We know what it can do with slender resources and a few moments of not undivided thought amid much distraction, and when it has done all, and done it handsomely, how much is left! There is scarcely any diminution of one's store. Yet the thing was done well and handsomely.

Robert Louis Stevenson tells us that when the natives in Samoa came to visit anyone they stayed till they had cleared the house. And one word in their language meant a visit and a visitation—a visit from a friend and an overwhelming

disaster. That proves more the greed of the guests than the generosity of the host. The latter cannot help himself. But it was not so with God ! All that God had—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—all Their original powers, attributes, qualities, possessions, all They had and all They were, and all that it was possible for Them to become, all They could add to Their infinite and eternal state by the exercise of infinite wisdom —that They freely gave at the bidding of infinite love. That the Son of God should become man and take our nature and bear our sins in His own body on the tree, and that it should please God to bruise Him, and the Holy Spirit to forsake Him, and that all this should be done not only willingly, not only joyfully, but as it were from the very compulsion of Their nature—that the Cross of Christ should be not only a landmark, a milestone, in Their eternal history, but that it should be the pivot round which all eternities should revolve, the foundation-stone on which the very being and character and honour of God should rest—that it should be the *terminus ad quem* and the *terminus a quo* of all God ever did—I say that God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost should have based not simply a little of Their honour, or somewhat of Their joy, but all Their honour and all Their joy, and even Their very existence, on the Cross of Christ, is a thing so full of wonder that one can see now how it is God represents the holy angels as being never able to take their eyes from off His mercy-seat. When I find that God has no table to sit at but

the one He has prepared for us, and that He cannot sit down till we sit down too; and further find that every guest that comes means a new eternity and a new infinity of joy to Him, surely the last excuse that I shall ever dream of giving for refusing to come to this marriage supper is the fear that there may be no room.

Oh, my dear friends, only look at the size of the banquet table, only look at the greatness of that sacrificial Lamb—look at all He is, and has been, and shall be—look at the countless gifts and honours God is still making ready for Him—I say if there is room in that house for the table, room for the feast of fat things that are prepared, room for an Infinite God, is there not room for one poor guest like me ?

There is a very beautiful thing you will sometimes find amongst the very poor. You will see a family of eight or ten, and some day you call and find an eleventh there, and you are told it is a poor neighbour's child; it is an orphan boy, or a motherless little girl; and the good woman of the house will tell you, modestly making light of her sacrifice, that the child's bite will never be missed. And it is true; for the orphan's God puts in with His hand as much as the orphan takes out; the child brings a blessing. And so we may say of God, gazing at that store of pleasures that are at His right hand and at that fountain of living water that flows from His throne, your bite and mine will never be missed; nay, your presence and mine will not only add to the joy of the feast, but if all the

store at that table were only what one single guest would bring, as in the story of the little lad with the five loaves and two fishes, there would be no need to say, "But what are these amongst so many?" but rather, "Make them all sit down, and make Father, Son, and Holy Ghost sit down, too." There would be enough for all eternity if only one disciple were to bring his own supply; much more would there be enough if all brought something and only one came empty.

May I not add, in the fourth place, as a proof that there is room, the eagerness of your fellow-guests? Have you not sometimes noticed that as you sat in a railway carriage, or in some meeting, the place seems full already, as full as it can hold, but someone comes whom you know, someone whose face you like, someone who looks in so wistfully, and you are all happy and good natured, and you say, "Come in." "But is there room?" "Oh, we'll find room, we'll make room." There's an expansive power in love, and in two moments you find there was a place for the new-comer, and already his company has more than paid for his room. You laugh and say, "And yet there is room. We could take in another!"

What is the last word in the Bible uttered by the saints in Heaven? Isn't it the one word, Come? "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come." Oh, the pleading in that one word "Come!"

We read in history, in the life of Isaac Butt, that he was led to throw himself into a certain cause by a telegram he once received. He was

at a public meeting in Ireland, when a telegram was handed to him on the platform. It contained over a thousand words; and when he read it and thought over it at his leisure he said, "The people that send a telegram of a thousand words are in dead earnest."

Perhaps some of you are weary of long invitations to come to Christ—you cannot deny you have had them, but there is one last, clear call, "Come! Bring the children with you."

Yet remember that, great as is the earnestness of those who are in glory, their earnestness after all is but impatience compared with the earnestness of God. How long, O Lord? the souls under the altar are represented as crying; and it was said unto them they should rest yet a little while, there were others on the way.

Shall I give you a fifth reason? It is this—we know there's room because, alas! so many have refused. All are asked, some way or other. Many refuse contemptuously, many accept provisionally, many promise to come, and we meet them afterwards and say, "I thought you were going. Have you changed your mind?"

I had once to look through a diary, which came into my possession, of a lady into whose life came for a time great joy—the hope of a happy marriage. From that hour the whole tone of her diary was changed. It was as if the sun had burst forth after a time of bitter wind and constant rain. Then suddenly, under a certain date, there were two words—and two words only—"Came not." No need to supply the noun or

pronoun—no need to add an adverbial or any other clause—the whole pathos and tragedy of life were in those words, "Came not." And every day Christ has to write these words about men, and the writing of them never becomes easier. We pity the woman who sits at home to receive visitors, and no visitor comes, and her neighbours are witnesses of her disappointment and her shame. We pity the hostess who gets refusals to her invitations, and withdrawals after acceptances, and even if not asked at first most people with a heart would go to please her if she came and told them there were empty places, so many empty places, that she would like filled. But Christ asked you and me long, long ago, and we said, "I will come." Then we drew back and He said, Will *ye* also go away? And still His invitations pursue us, and He knocks and cries, "All the day long have I stretched forth My hands to a disobedient and gainsaying people."

Is there anyone here unsaved? That proves there's room. Your place is empty, and that's what the King has sent me to tell you this afternoon. For every reason, and by every argument, you should be there, and you know it. For, in the sixth place, where else are you to go to? There must be some worthy place for a being made in the image of God. If you saw a man or woman sleeping on a stair would you not say, This is no place for you! If you see a poor creature, once her father's joy, loitering on the street at midnight, does your heart not

go out? Eleven o'clock, twelve—and still there, homeless and heartless. What would you say if you found a little child lying sleeping on the pavement in the bitter blast of a winter night? "Is there no room but here for you?" So may I say, Hell is no place for you or me. It would vex us if we found any of our number begging at a door, or slouching past us in the street afraid of recognition. Oh, how it would vex us to find one of our family in jail! Yet sad as that would be, hope would still remain, however slender; yet even the slenderest hope is a possession of great price. But for you or me to go to hell—a place prepared only for the devil and his angels, who wantonly, deliberately, causelessly, ruined themselves, and then, with thousandfold greater sin, set themselves to ruin another race of beings, to help whom would have been their highest task—surely, surely God never meant that. Don't imagine He needs that in order to secure the praise of His glorious justice. Justice has been already sufficiently, amply, magnificently glorified in the death of Jesus Christ. If you or I or all of us are lost, it will not be because there was no room for us in glory. Our seat, our place, our throne is there, waiting for us.

And on the other hand, the worst of us here to-day is not fit for hell. Bad though we may be—and the holiest man or woman here may well tremble at the thought of his or her sins, known and unknown—we would be out of place there. That's no place for you. Don't, I be-

seech you by the mercies of God, don't try to make yourselves fit for it.

Is it not, in the seventh place, enough to say that God Himself says, There's room; and these words are as it were written up before us for our encouragement.

There is another side to the divine decree that I am not called to dwell on, or defend. Defend I cannot, unless by resting, not on the sovereignty, but on the absolute holiness and justice of God. God has no right to do what He pleases unless it is a right and just thing to do.

He asks me to come. He pleads. He prays. He bids me come. He gives His oath. He tells us He has nothing to gain by the loss of a single soul. We might have known that; surely we will believe it.

With God "yea" means "yea." He speaks true words. With you or me it is not so. We say, Come, but we don't mean it, and we take care sometimes to show we don't.

"I was telling Colonel Leigh," says a great lady of last century, in her Memoirs, "that I had been invited to a certain house." "Did they ask you for a certain date?" was the Colonel's answer.

This afternoon I bid you come in God's name. There's room, there's time to come, and He is waiting.

How do I know? You'll not believe me, and you'll not believe God. May I remind you of the one time in His life where we read of our Lord having a place of abode? I don't know

where it was, or what kind of a place it was, but two men asked Him where He lived, and the answer was that magnificent one, "Come and see." NOT, A long way from here, or in a place you would never find out, or even in such and such a street, near such and such a sign. NOT, Come to-morrow, or any time you are passing, or come any time it suits you, or come—but only if possible send Me word beforehand; but, "Come and see. I'll not tell you; you'll simply come with Me."

And may God Almighty incline you and me to listen, so that it may be said of us as of those first disciples: They went therefore and abode with Him.

"They came and saw where He dwelt, and abode with Him that day, for it was about the tenth hour." Perhaps with some here it may be the eleventh hour.

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